

inside... Wegmans, Wal-Mart & Media Bias • Wal-Mart Pricing Report • Consumer Packaging • Wholesalers • Q & A With Joe Procacci  
West Mexico Winter Produce • Salad Dressing • Food Miles • Organic Distribution • Peruvian Asparagus • JUICE • Dining In Houston  
Apples • SWEET POTATOES • Florida Fall Produce • Red River Valley Potatoes • SAN LUIS VALLEY POTATOES • Guacamole • PECANS • Mini Plants

OCT. 2007 • VOL. 23 • NO. 10 • \$9.90

# produce business

MARKETING • MERCHANDISING • MANAGEMENT • PROCUREMENT



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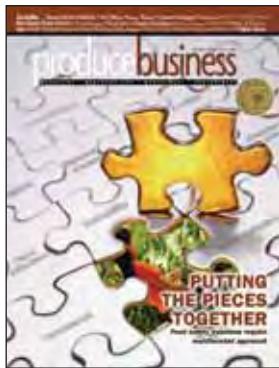
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# PRODUCE QUIZ



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After 32 years of working in the grocery business, Gary Cope, owner/buyer for Isabella Supermarket, Lake Isabella, CA, doesn't have too much to complain about, particularly when it comes to his produce department. "I like to get hands-on in the produce department, work with our displays and challenge my guys to go above and beyond," he says. "We're in a highly agricultural area near Bakersfield, CA, so we're really focused on using our resources and making sure we're providing the freshest produce on the market."

Gary, who has overseen the supermarket's trucking and grocery operations for five years, reads PRODUCE BUSINESS to keep up with industry trends and consumer demands. "I also use the pictures for ideas and to help motivate our employees," he adds.

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- 5) What is the toll-free number for California Sun Dry? \_\_\_\_\_
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OCTOBER QUIZ PRODUCE BUSINESS • P.O. Box 810425 • Boca Raton, FL 33481-0425

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President & Editor-in-Chief • JAMES E. PREVOR  
JPrevor@phoenixmedianet.com

Publishing Director • KENNETH L. WHITACRE  
KWhitacre@phoenixmedianet.com

Editorial Director • LEE SMITH  
LSmith@phoenixmedianet.com

Managing Editor • JAN FIALKOW  
JFialkow@phoenixmedianet.com

Special Projects Editor • MIRA SLOTT  
MSlott@phoenixmedianet.com

Assistant Editor • AMY SHANNON  
AShannon@phoenixmedianet.com

Circulation Manager • KELLY ROSKIN  
KRoskin@phoenixmedianet.com

Executive Assistant • FRAN GRUSKIN  
FGruskin@phoenixmedianet.com

European Bureau Chief • ROBERT ZWARTKRUIS  
RZwartkruis@phoenixmedianet.com

Production Director • DIANA LEVINE  
DLevine@phoenixmedianet.com

Production Leader • JACKIE TUCKER

Production Department  
FREDDY PULIDO  
JOANNA ARMSTRONG

Trade Show Coordinator • Jackie LoMonte  
JLoMonte@phoenixmedianet.com

Contributing Editors  
MEREDITH AUERBACH, CAROL BAREUTHER,  
DUANE CRAIG, HEATHER CROW, MAURCIA HOUCK,  
LYNN GALANIS, BOB GATTY, BOB JOHNSON,  
JACQUELINE ROSS LIEBERMAN, LISA LIEBERMAN,  
LIZ PARKS, BARBARA ROBISON, TRISHA J. WOOLDRIDGE

Advertising  
ERIC NIEMAN, ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER  
ENieman@phoenixmedianet.com  
SANDY LEE  
SLee@phoenixmedianet.com  
BILL MARTIN  
Martinmedia45@peoplepc.com  
ELLEN ROSENTHAL  
ERosenthal@phoenixmedianet.com

Floral Department Marketing  
E. SHAUNA ALDERMAN  
SAlderman@phoenixmedianet.com

Marketing Solutions and Integrated Sales  
JIM DELEGUARDIA  
JDeleguardia@phoenixmedianet.com

Send insertion orders, payments, press releases, photos, letters to the editor, etc., to:

PRODUCE BUSINESS  
P.O. Box 810425  
Boca Raton, FL 33481-0425  
Phone: 561-994-1118 Fax: 561-994-1610  
E-mail: ProduceBusiness@phoenixmedianet.com

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# Magazine With A Mission

**N**ormally the pages of PRODUCE BUSINESS are, well, all business. Yet once a year, in this issue, we like to set aside a note to give our readers a report on the year just passed and our expectations for the future.

You see, this is our anniversary. PRODUCE BUSINESS was launched at the PMA convention in San Francisco in 1985, so we are 22 years old this month, just around the age students would graduate from college.

It is a fitting analogy, as PRODUCE BUSINESS has truly grown comfortable in its own skin — or should we say its own cover — over the last several years. We were always filled with ambition and, right from day one, we set the highest standards, looking to "Initiate Industry Improvement."

Great publications don't spring up over night. Trust must be earned and decades of work now pay off every day in the trust the trade places in our work. If part of that trust is due to content, it is just as much due to attitude.

For example, we recognize our interest in developing a top-class executive corps for the industry. So, we produce our annual *40-Under-Forty* issue to celebrate and encourage young talent in the trade. Personally, I've been honored to serve as a founding member of the Pack Family/PMA Career Pathways steering committee, and in that context, PRODUCE BUSINESS has contributed to the recruiting efforts of the industry as we work to bring young college students — now from all over the world — to PMA's Annual Convention and thus to introduce them to a career in the produce trade.

I've also been honored to offer my time *pro bono publico* to serve on the faculty of the United Fresh Produce Executive Development Program with Cornell University and thus help industry executives to the next level.

PRODUCE BUSINESS also is a founding sponsor of the Nucci Scholarship for Culinary Innovation — an effort to bring students at Culinary Schools to PMA's Foodservice Conference and thus expose these students to the excitement a career in produce offers.

We also partner with PMA and Cornell to sponsor the Leadership Symposium, an experience that takes produce industry executives and exposes them to ideas outside the produce paradigm.

These actions are those of a *Magazine with a Mission* and, in the case of PRODUCE BUSINESS, all of this speaks to a commitment to elevate the professional standards of the trade and, well, help the industry to be all it can be.

We've moved dramatically to take advantage of the unique characteristics of the Web to encourage learning and the diffusion of knowledge with our online offerings. These include digital versions of PRODUCE BUSINESS posted on [www.ProduceBusiness.com](http://www.ProduceBusiness.com) and, especially, the launch of our sister site [www.PerishablePundit.com](http://www.PerishablePundit.com).

The PERISHABLE PUNDIT almost instantly became the most read Web site in the business, offering information and insight not available elsewhere. Industry members from every continent, save Antarctica, have been so inspired by the dialog in the Pundit that they have been moved to contribute insights from across the globe. We've built a framework on which a valuable industry conversation is conducted every day on a broad range of industry-critical issues.

And now we are ready to combine both our commitment to building an effective leadership group for the industry and our dominant place on the Web. As a completely free industry service, we are launching [www.PunditJobs.com](http://www.PunditJobs.com). Available on the Web, as a regular e-mail or an RSS feed, the site will provide both a place for companies to list their executive employment needs and for individuals to post their "position wanted" requests.

An industry can't be better than its people, and what ties all the things we are doing together is that they are all about helping the industry to access great people and then helping those individuals to realize their potential. We are convinced that by getting the most out of the best, the industry is sure to prosper. We are privileged to play a leading role in making this happen.

That we are in a position to do all this speaks to the efforts of a lot of very special people as well. The team that makes PRODUCE BUSINESS and the PERISHABLE PUNDIT happen shows a dedication that is rare in this day and age. I personally owe them a great deal as do all who have found value in what we do.

Our advertisers and sponsors provide the sustenance that makes all we do possible. Their leadership, their vision, their willingness to not look for short term paybacks but, instead, to support an independent voice, confident in the knowledge that they can do well for themselves by doing good for the industry, is exceptional — and we are most grateful to call such stalwart supporters our friends.

Most especially, though, we have to thank you, our readers. Publishing, in print or online, is inherently lifeless; it is only the decision by readers to give up some of their valuable time to consider what we offer that adds life and verve to the written word. It is only the willingness to take ideas and try them out that gives those ideas wings. And it is only the willingness to think hard, to understand more and a willingness to undertake an effort to realize one's potential that allows the power of an argument well made to change the world. We have been blessed with the most important thing any publisher can hope for: Readers who care about the subjects we cover.

It is a trust we take seriously. We thank all involved for helping to bring us to where we can make the kind of contribution we do to the trade. We pledge to continue our efforts to deliver value in the days — and the decades — to come.

**pb**

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Reader Service # 22



# Sharing The Value Chain

**T**his year's PMA Fresh Summit expo halls will be chock full of industry efforts to better connect with consumers, from more environmentally friendly production practices, to easy-serve and recyclable packaging, to licensing popular characters to engage children in healthful eating. But perhaps one of the most influential actions a company can take involves not the face of a cartoon character but the face of the people behind the produce, according to PMA's latest consumer survey of consumer attitudes about social responsibility.

We learned loud and clear from a telephone survey of 1,000 key consumers at the end of July that the social responsibility of companies growing and selling produce is highly important to consumers when making produce purchase decisions — in fact, 55 percent place the highest degree of importance on this factor (with a mean score of 4.1 out of 5).

Not surprisingly, however, respondents diverged on how they define social responsibility. They were read a list of issues related to social responsibility in growing and selling fresh produce and asked to rank their top three issues. Organics tops the list for 13 percent of respondents, while distance from farm to store and fair living wages each rate next with 11 percent. Global warming garners 8 percent and recycled and recyclable packaging earn 8 and 7 percent respectively — and when combined at 15 percent, packaging rates higher than any other issue. (Meanwhile, 9 percent of consumers reveal they don't know what their most important social responsibility issue is — again highlighting that this social trend is still in its formative stages in the minds of many customers.)

This research tells us consumers look to their produce suppliers to help them be more socially responsible — and this presents us with the opportunity to build a deeper relationship with them. Yet, in working to make the produce supply chain more efficient over the years, it looks as if we have missed this opportunity; consumers now view themselves as more socially responsible than they view business, including the produce industry.

About one-third (33 percent) of surveyed consumers label themselves as extremely socially responsible, another 32 percent as at least somewhat socially responsible. Meanwhile, only 24 percent assign the same tags to business in general; the produce industry is better perceived, with 33 percent rating us as being either somewhat or extremely socially responsible. Clearly, for a produce industry to which sustainability is central to our very being, we have room for improvement.

What can we do about it? Consumers draw conclusions of social responsibility from the face a company reveals. To them, produce isn't about building a better supply chain; it's about building a better value chain. In focusing the past few decades on making our supply chain more efficient, we lost a link to our end customer. We must now get back to the basics — we must devolve to evolve to the next level of customer relations.

It shouldn't be hard for us; sustainability is at the very heart of our farming traditions. We need to share the values inherent in our value chain by putting a face with the food our customers eat and touting our already socially responsible activities. And where we find ourselves lacking, we need to consider change.

First, look in the mirror and inventory the sustainable steps you're already taking. Share how your organization takes responsibility for the impact of its activities on customers, employees, shareholders, communities and the environment — whether paying your workers a fair wage so their children can go to college with yours or analyzing your packaging to maximize product protection while minimizing environmental impact. Then, maximize your communication opportunities through that packaging, your Web sites and other means to share your company's story. Place a friendly company face on packaging; post family recipes online. Reveal the human side of your business, and make your customers a part of that experience. Social responsibility is all about connecting, less about selling. Yet if positioned honestly and authentically, social responsibility speaks directly to consumers' values and can earn

**S**ustainability is at the very heart of our farming traditions.

unwavering customer loyalty in the process.

As I walk the floor of Fresh Summit in Houston, the heart and soul of our industry will come alive in the new and familiar faces I see all around me; it always does. As growers and suppliers of the most healthful and delicious foods available, we know social responsibility is embedded in our work — in sound growing and production practices, consumption and nutrition, packaging and transportation, and food safety and security. Doing an even better job of revealing our industry's heart and soul may well be the key to our success for decades to come.

Let me add a special footnote for those readers of PRODUCE BUSINESS who are in Houston and reading this article: I hope you'll consider attending Jim Prevor's presentation on new research just conducted in the United States and United Kingdom during the workshop entitled *What Do Consumers Really Think About Corporate Social Responsibility?*

I know Jim will have a lot to add to the understanding of a consumer trend that is still in its formative stages. Hosting this important workshop is just one way in which PMA is helping develop our collective understanding of a social trend growing stronger every day.

# Just Being Nice?

When consumers tell us things that are hard to believe, the role of the researcher is to ask simply this: I wonder why the consumer is telling us such a thing? So when Bryan explains the PMA research shows "the social responsibility of companies growing and selling produce is highly important to consumers when making produce purchase decisions," we have to wonder what this could possibly mean.

The vast majority of items sold in the produce department are not branded; others have labels with names of obscure produce companies unfamiliar to consumers. In most cases those names aren't the actual grower anyway — just a packer or processor. Plus only a few names sell more than one category. A typical produce department can represent hundreds of vendors and tens of thousands of growers.

One would have to believe at least 55 percent of consumers are spending countless hours on the Internet researching produce vendors and their suppliers to think consumers have any information on this subject — much less enough for it to be a "highly important" factor in purchasing decisions.

Since nobody really believes this, we are left wondering what this statistic could mean.

This question is reinforced because in response to PMA's social responsibility list, no issue was ranked as No. 1 for more than 15 percent of consumers. This raises the likelihood that not only don't consumers have the information needed to evaluate produce companies on social responsibility issues but there is also no consensus on what social responsibility actually means.

This is important because it is quite possible consumers mean different things by terms such as "social responsibility" than do "experts" in this field. Experts tend to be talking in macro — how a chain or a store impacts the world. Consumers often look at these things in micro — how a store or chain affects my community.

So to the experts, a chain that spends millions buying "carbon offsets" may score high on sustainability. Consumers might view a

chain that doesn't do that but spends the same money rebuilding a local park, helping local schools and hospitals, etc., as more "socially responsible."

It is not surprising consumers would consider themselves more socially responsible than business. The term is so vague and so subjective it almost boils down to being "nice" — treating other people well, not littering, cleaning up after oneself, etc. With such a definition, we shouldn't be surprised if consumers think they are nicer to their friends, relatives and co-workers than companies are to their employees or suppliers.

In all likelihood, PMA's finding about the high value consumers place on social responsibility points to three ideas:

1) **It gives us a sense that this is part of the *zeitgeist*, a German expression roughly translated as "the spirit of the age."** People do not live in isolation, and part of what they search for in selecting product and services and choosing shopping venues is the approbation of friends and relatives. So we can surmise that when social responsibility distinction can be communicated to consumers, a positive reputation for social responsibility will be an effective tool in attracting customers.

In another time, people might have been proud to tell their friends all the fresh produce items at tonight's dinner party were grown in their own Victory Garden. Today they might identify that the store where they shop supports local farmers or the produce is grown in a way good for the environment.

2) **The study also may point to the risk of being identified as not socially responsible.** Because consumers have so little information, allegations and news reports can powerfully influence their actions. This is nothing new. The famous "grape boycott" was successful both because consumers wanted to avoid companies perceived as socially irresponsible and because they had no knowledge of the way grape farmers treated their labor nor of the intricacies of union politics.

There is also a waterfall effect. Retailers who don't want to be seen as socially irresponsible may simply stop carrying brands or

**I**t is quite possible consumers mean different things by the use of terms such as "social responsibility."

products identified negatively on these measurements. In any case, there is an enormous downside risk to being identified as socially irresponsible and, this, as much as any upside to being identified as socially responsible, might justify efforts by any industry member to perform well in this regard.

3) **We can see the incipient importance of certifications.** Combine a desire to be on the right side of these issues with consumer ignorance of the facts and a virtual impossibility of gaining the facts on their own, and one has a recipe for certifications to be effective at boosting sales, enhancing retail reputations and preserving shelf space at retail. Consumers may not be able to investigate a company's environmental impact, but a "Rainforest Alliance" certification can reassure.

The consumer cannot be expected to know how much a grower in a third-world country pays its employees, but a "fair-trade" certification can allow consumers to feel good about their purchase. Retailers can be expected to want to benefit from the halo effect of these types of certifications as well — thus making a certification a powerful argument for a slot in the warehouse and shelf space in the store.

Bryan has it precisely correct when he says, "Social responsibility is all about connecting, less about selling." It is ultimately about setting aside the usual commercial concerns such as product and price and allowing customers — both trade customers and consumers — to evaluate whether you, as a company, are the kind of organization they want to do business with.



# The Consumer Covenant

**A** year after the great spinach crisis of 2006, we can look back and see that much has been accomplished regarding food safety.

Specific efforts, such as the California Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement, have made vulnerable items safer today, and a multitude of initiatives to expand safety programs on other items are afoot.

Research efforts, such as the \$2 million dollar initiative funded by Fresh Express, as well as the UCDavis-based Center for Produce Safety, launched with \$4.65 million committed by Taylor Farms, PMA, the state of California and UCDavis, are designed to make produce safer in the future by helping us understand better how risks to produce safety develop and how such risks can be ameliorated.

PMA and United's call for mandatory, federal, food safety regulation has laid a framework for rebuilding regulatory and consumer confidence in fresh produce.

Fundamentally, food safety remains problematic because retailers are not willing to accept responsibility for the safety of what they sell.

Of course, retailers care about food safety. Tim York of Markon and Dave Corsi of Wegmans launched the Buyer-led Food Safety Initiative, and, with the help of 20 of their colleagues who signed the initiative, played an important role in the success of the California Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement and other initiatives.

Though the search for industry-wide solutions is admirable, it doesn't absolve retailers of their responsibility for safeguarding their own customers. And here, the needed cultural shift has still not taken place.

Always and forever, food safety of fresh produce is a retail responsibility. Consumers may absolve the store and blame Campbell's if soup is poisoned. But believing the chain deals with select farmers and ascertains the safety and quality of their produce is an intrinsic part of the relationship between retailer and consumer.

Retailers are the only ones who can put the industry on a virtuous cycle, in which growers and processors improve food safety, which gets them more business at better profits, which encourages other growers and processors to do an even better job, which brings them more business at better prices and on and on.

Unfortunately, the industry is stuck with, at best, efforts to raise minimum standards. This was made very evident when Costco, one of our industry's marquee retailers, had a recall late this past summer on carrots. The carrot industry is highly concentrated. There are only two players of any size and only one truly prominent name.

So, how did such a large, prominent retailer wind up buying from such a minor player?

The answer: The retailer's carrot buyer was not charged with finding the safest carrots; he was charged with finding the least

expensive carrots meeting some minimum safety standard.

This way of thinking about procurement is bad for the industry and, in some fundamental way, breaks trust with the customer.

It is bad for the industry because it means the industry leaders in food safety get no "extra points" for undertaking extra effort — or extra expense. As a result, companies become far less likely to undertake extra food-safety efforts or incur extra expenses to implement improved food safety programs.

Almost all quality third-party certifications require, as a part of their metrics, continuous improvement; fixed minimum standards are, well, fixed. What we want, as an industry, is for the small carrot processor to know A) If it doesn't match the food-safety standards of the industry leader, it has zero chance of getting the business, and B) If it can outperform the industry leader on food safety, it has an excellent chance of stealing the business away. This will put a tiger on the tail of the industry leader to make sure it is always top class on food safety. It is this virtuous cycle we want to drive.

Minimum fixed standards led to the attitude expressed by that small carrot processor when *PerishablePundit.com*, PRODUCE BUSINESS's sister publication, asked if it had any third party certifications. An executive at the processor pointed out, "Our customers do not require us to have certificates." In other words, why spend time and money if it won't help you get the business? In fact, where would the money come from to do this if buyers are indifferent to the efforts?

There is also the issue of consumer/retailer trust. Consumers shopping Costco don't want to take extra risks with their carrots; they want the best quality — incorporating food safety. They trust their retailer to get it for them.

Retailers hate the implication of this. They lose bargaining power because buyers will be forced to negotiate only with the top players since going to the guy with the second-best food-safety program is not an option. The vendor will probably make extra profit.

That's OK, though, and points to the simplest and most obvious lesson: If you want food safety, the key is rarely through regulations, which only raise minimum standards. If we set up the industry dynamic so vendors with the best food-safety programs always earn the highest margins and sell out of product, every vendor will fight to have a better food-safety program.

In the end, growers can't afford to implement any food-safety programs retailers won't pay for, and consumers cannot have faith in unknown farmers, only in their trusted retailer.

If year one after the spinach crisis focused on specific grower issues thought to contribute to the food-safety problem, year two has to focus on bringing the culture of procurement into sync with both the industry needs for a cycle of continuous improvement and the consumer need for a covenant of trust with the retailer.

**pb**

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**THE RIGHT CHOICE**



# WASHINGTON GRAPEVINE

A report on the inside happenings of government.

SUBMITTED BY ROBERT GUENTHER, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, PUBLIC POLICY • UNITED FRESH PRODUCE ASSOCIATION



# Produce Food Safety Act

**O**n Sept. 20, Sen. Tom Harkin (D-IA), Chairman of the Senate Agriculture Committee introduced the Produce Food Safety Act of 2007. It established a national food-safety framework for all fresh produce and comes one year after an outbreak of food-borne illness caused by *E. coli* in fresh bagged spinach that sickened more than 200 people and killed three. This action could signal an increased concern about how fresh produce is regulated in the country.

The Act gives FDA the authority to make its current voluntary guidelines mandatory. It requires FDA to establish national standards tailored to specific commodities and risk factors in the environments where each is grown. It also requires stepped-up inspections of operations that grow and process fresh produce, such as spinach or lettuce. Other key provisions of the bill include:

- A surveillance system to identify the sources of fresh produce contamination.
- A rulemaking requirement to ensure imported produce has been grown and processed with U.S. standards.
- Requiring the Secretary of Health and Human Services to establish good manufacturing standards through rulemaking for good manufacturing practices for the minimal processing of produce. The standards will include sanitation standard operating procedures, water standards and water sampling programs, and other requirements as determined by the Secretary.

- Requiring the Secretary to inspect facilities that minimally process produce to monitor compliance with Act requirements. Inspections will be at least once per growing season for high-risk facilities and less frequently for medium- and low-risk facilities as deemed by the Secretary. Each inspection will evaluate whether the facility is appropriately classified by risk. Within 48 hours of the inspection, the owner or operator of the facility will receive a report setting forth any conditions of practices observed that indicate any violations of this Act.

- Requiring the Secretary to establish gen-

eral standards through rulemaking for good agricultural practices for the production of raw agricultural commodities. The standards will include manure application management, exclusion of domestic animals to the extent reasonable and practicable during growing and harvesting seasons, water standards and ground water monitoring, consid-

**Some elements could be useful steps and others may be well intentioned but not productive in enhancing public health and safety.**

eration for environmental conditions such as flooding and runoff, and other requirements as determined by the Secretary.

- Establishing an active surveillance system to assess more accurately the frequency and sources of human illness in the United States associated with the consumption of fresh produce. The surveillance system will be established and maintained by FDA, CDC, and EPA. The surveillance system will include collection and analyses of samples of fresh produce, both minimally processed and unprocessed, to assess more accurately the nature, frequency of occurrence, and amounts of contaminants in fresh produce.

- Establishing an FDA-USDA national public education program on food safety related to produce. The program will provide public information on federal standards and good manufacturing and good agricultural practices relating to food safety.

- Authorizing the Secretary of Agriculture, in consultation with FDA, to conduct research on improving food safety in produce.

The Act is a useful first step in considering ways the government can more effectively ensure safety and also raise public confidence to increase their consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables. The produce industry's first commitment must be to food safety, and many commodities are working hard every day to implement the most rigorous food safety practices from field to table. These practices are commodity-specific and thus tailored to address specific preventative measures for different commodities grown and harvested in many different ways.

In looking at Sen. Harkin's legislation, there are some elements that could be useful steps and others that may be well intentioned but not productive in enhancing public health and safety. For example, the industry supports ensuring that strong Good Agricultural Practices are developed and applied to various commodities based on potential risk. The industry supports the call for greater public education and research in the area of produce food safety and a commitment that domestic and imported produce meet the same safety standards regardless of point of origin. However, some of the legislation's suggestions are overly prescriptive, calling for on-farm management systems that would offer limited value in assuring food safety. We believe those types of issues and recommendations are best determined in cooperation with scientists at USDA and FDA, rather than in legislation.

Sen. Harkin has long been a champion of the need to increase produce consumption to improve public health and a strong supporter of food-safety measures to assure the public enjoys the safest, highest quality fruits and vegetables possible. It is too early to tell if this legislation can make any progress in Congress, but it is safe to say the industry will continue to ensure we are taking all steps needed to grow and market the safest possible produce and to give consumers the confidence they need to increase their consumption of fruits and vegetables to meet the U.S. Dietary Guidelines, reduce the incidence of obesity and improve their long-term health.



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*Absolutely fresh because it's still alive!*

### MANN PACKING, SALINAS, CA

**Dick Ramsey** has been appointed as co-chairman of the board of directors, following the resignation of his father Bill, who is becoming an ex-officio board member. Under Dick's tenure in sales, Mann saw its business morph from being largely a broccoli supplier to frozen food companies into the largest shipper of bunch broccoli.



### AMERIFRESH INC., SCOTTSDALE, AZ

**Rick Harris** has been named director of business development. He has eight years of experience in the fresh produce industry and was formerly retail account manager with AgroFresh. He was also senior technical service representative for Apio and account manager with Del Monte.



**Brad Johnson** has been named produce sales associate and will work out of the Idaho Falls office. He has served in sales and sales management for Rogers Foods, Sunspiced and Wada Farms. He has additional experience with the Idaho Growers and Shippers Association and the United Potato Growers of Idaho Co-op.



### J.B.J. DISTRIBUTING, INC., FULLERTON, CA

**Alex Dupré** has joined the company as fresh-cut manager. His most recent position was with Pacific Fresh Foods where he managed the organic specialty cut division. Early in his career, he managed production of fresh-cut salads and delicatessen salads at Michelle Foods and then went on to Orval Kent Co. He was also worked for Dole Fresh Vegetables.



**Steve Janedis** has joined the company as director of business development. He will concentrate on current relationships and developing new relationships throughout the country. He has been in the produce industry for 25 years and has worked for Vons Grocery Company, Del Monte Fresh Produce, Albert's Organics and most recently Whole Foods Markets.



### SUN WORLD INTERNATIONAL, COACHELLA, CA

**Juanita Gaglio** has been named director of marketing, a newly created position. She will be responsible for promoting the Sun World product line through public relations, trade shows, developing and cultivating retail relations with promotional programs and category management, as well as forecasting industry trends.



### DOLE FRESH FRUIT CO., WESTLAKE VILLAGE, CA

**Ronda Reed** has been named vice president of marketing for fresh fruit and vegetables. In this role, she will oversee and integrate all strategic marketing operations, new product development, consumer promotions, packaging and public relations for these two areas in North America. She has been with Dole for 12 years, most recently as director of marketing for fresh fruit.



### DOLE FRESH VEGETABLES, INC., SALINAS, CA

**Charlie Briggs** has been hired as regional accounts manager, Northeast region. He will be responsible for providing customer service and sales support for value-added customers throughout the Northeast. He has 20 years of experience in the industry, including time Bionova, Coast to Coast, Farmer Boy, the New Jersey Tomato Council and Dole's Fresh Fruit Division.



### TANIMURA & ANTLE (T&A), SALINAS, CA

**John Killeen** has returned to the company as vice president of marketing and business development, a newly created position. He will be developing new products as well as marketing and business plans. He was with T&A from 1997 to 1999. His most recent position was as vice president of sales and marketing at NewStar.



### EARTHBOUND FARM, SAN JUAN BAUTISTA, CA

**Daniel Alonso** has been promoted from senior sales associate to sales manager, foodservice. He has been with the company for nearly three years since graduating from Cal Poly San Obispo with a degree in agriculture business management. As an undergraduate, he interned with Earthbound's quality assurance department.



**Kyle Truesdell** has been promoted from senior sales associate to sales manager, retail sales. He joined the company in 2005 after graduating from Cal Poly San Obispo with a degree in agriculture business. His primary focus will be selling Earthbound Farm products to retail accounts in the Midwest.



### COLUMBIA MARKETING INTERNATIONAL (CMI), WENATCHEE, WA

**Bob Mast** has been promoted to vice president of marketing. Has been with CMI since 2003 as director of marketing. He previously worked with Fry's (a 107-store division of Kroger) as the assistant produce director/produce category manager for all stores. He has extensive training in marketing and category/inventory management.



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### PANDOL BROTHERS, INC., DELANO, CA

David Dever has been chosen to be the new CEO. He led the management team responsible for marketing, sales, quality control, financial and administrative functions at Ballantine Produce for five years as its executive vice president and CFO. For 10 years prior to that, he was a vice president at Gerawan Farming, focusing the company on its premium-quality product niche.



### NATURIPE FARMS, NAPLES, FL

Bruce Peterson has joined Naturipe as president and CEO. He is 37-year veteran of the produce industry, most recently president of Peterson Insights, Inc. Prior to that, he spent 15 years at Wal-Mart Stores, Inc., where he successfully launched and built the perishable foods division. He retired from Wal-Mart as senior vice president of perishables.



### 100-CALORIES SNACKS

Litehouse Foods, Sandpoint, ID, introduces 100-Calorie Reduced Sugar Caramel Snack Packs available nationally in 6-packs of single-serving 1.5-ounce cups with a suggested retail of \$2.99. The packaging addresses one of the hottest trends in the marketplace – pre-packaged 100-calorie snacks.



Reader Service No. 300

### CLAMSHELL ARTICHOOKES

Ocean Mist Farms, Castroville, CA, has introduced baby artichokes and a 2-count jumbo organic artichoke clamshell pack. Both new clamshell packs allow retailers to carry a secondary size artichoke next to their bulk display. The recyclable packaging means less bruising of artichokes due to less handling.



Reader Service No. 302

### ALL-NATURAL FREEZE-DRIED FRUIT

Funky Monkey Snacks, Fishers, IN, introduces Fruit that Crunches! in four flavors of all-natural, freeze-dried fruit: banana and cinnamon; banana, pineapple, apple, papaya and raisins; pineapple and lime juice; and banana and açai. All contain no added sugar, preservatives, colors or flavors and are gluten-, wheat- and dairy-free and certified kosher.



Reader Service No. 301

### ON-THE-GO ENTRÉE PACKAGING

Wilkinson Industries, Inc., Fort Calhoun, NE, introduces easy-seal FreshServe round and rectangular bowls and lids, perfect for fresh-cuts and salads. Rectangular in 16-, 32- and 64-ounce sizes made of clear PET. Round in 8-, 16-, 32- and 64-ounce sizes made of clear OPS. Black bases are also an option in round and rectangular bowls.



Reader Service No. 303

### RED BLOSSOM OFFERS

#### ON-LINE TRACEABILITY

Red Blossom Farms, Inc., Santa Maria, CA, now offers electronic traceability for strawberries, which can be accessed through the company Web site. Customers at all levels of the distribution chain can input a clamshell's traceback code on the Web site and instantly receive a detailed report of that product's source.



Reader Service No. 304

### A.M.S. TEAMS WITH FUSION MARKETING

A.M.S. Exotic, LLC, Los Angeles, CA, announces a partnership with Fusion Marketing, Los Angeles, CA. The agreement will allow A.M.S. to be the first company in the baby vegetable business to offer category management capabilities to its retail partners. Fusion Marketing specializes in datacentric marketing (category management).



Reader Service No. 305

### SUNSET SPLENDIDO WINS AWARD

Mastronardi Produce, Ltd., Leamington, ON, Canada, announces its Sunset Splendido has won the "Best Hothouse Specialty Tomato in the Tomato Capital of Canada" award at this year's Leamington Tomato Festival. The tomatoes entered were judged on sizing, texture, ripening stages, taste and appearance. The competition took place on Aug. 18, 2007.



Reader Service No. 306

### DOMESTIC FALL/WINTER SWEET ONION

Peri & Sons Farms, Inc., Yerington, NV, is offering Sweetie Sweet domestic sweet onions through February. The exclusive sweet onion is farmed, packaged and shipped by Peri. Special ad pricing and support POS available. Packaging options include soft net header bags, soft net Ultra bags, Vexar soft net bags, 40-pound cartons, RPCs and Euro boxes.



Reader Service No. 307

### CARAMEL APPLE WRAP

Concord Foods, Brockton, MA, reminds retailers that fall is the perfect time to cross-merchandise apples with both its Caramel Apple Wrap and Microwaveable Caramel Apple Kit. When decorated with nuts, sprinkles or chocolate drizzle, caramel apples make delicious gourmet treats for Halloween and holiday parties as well as terrific holiday gifts.



Reader Service No. 308

### INTERNATIONAL PAPER REACHES AGREEMENT ON MILL BARGAINING

International Paper, Memphis, TN, has reached a 4-year agreement with the United Steelworkers of America. The agreement lays the groundwork for increased collaboration on employee health and safety and on public policy issues. It also prohibits labor strikes and lockouts during the term of current mill contracts and their 4-year extensions.



Reader Service No. 309

Produce Watch is a regular feature of PRODUCE BUSINESS. Please send information on new products, personnel changes, industry, corporate and personal milestones and available literature, along with a color photo, slide or transparency to: Managing Editor, PRODUCE BUSINESS, P.O. Box 810425, Boca Raton, FL 33481-0425, or e-mail us at [ProduceBusiness@phoenixmedianet.com](mailto:ProduceBusiness@phoenixmedianet.com)



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New Jersey Department of Agriculture 609-292-8853

**WINNING VIDALIA ONION DISPLAYS**  
The Vidalia Onion Committee, Vidalia, GA, has selected 10 produce managers from U.S. supermarkets as winners of its Sweet Rewards Merchandising Display Contest. Winners receive a \$50 gift card for each produce department employee. Photo entries were judged on creative techniques, cross-merchandising opportunities and other criteria.



Reader Service No. 310

### ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY TRUCKS

Global Organic Specialty Source, Inc., Sarasota, FL, announces that its entire fleet of sleeper-cab diesel trucks is being equipped with Thermo King's auxiliary power units (APUs). APUs use a small engine to power cab air-conditioning and heating systems, so drivers can shut off their truck's engine during rest and sleep periods.



Reader Service No. 312

### HONEYCRISP APPLES READY TO HIT SHELVES

The Michigan Apple Committee, DeWitt, MI, says some growers started harvesting the popular Honeycrisp apples two weeks earlier than anticipated. Last year, Honeycrisp apples accounted for a third of all new apple acres planted across the state. This translates to 240 new acres of Honeycrisp planted, for a total of 1,200 acres.



Reader Service No. 314

### NEW YORK BOLDS AVAILABLE NATIONALLY

New York Bold, LLC, Fulton, NY, has entered into a partnership with Keystone Fruit Marketing, Greencastle, PA, to market the New York Bold brand nationwide. National availability will add to the variety of onions consumers can choose from. Keystone plans to focus on educating consumers on the particular properties of New York Bold.



Reader Service No. 316

### NEW ORGANIC LABEL

Columbia Marketing International (CMI), Wenatchee, WA, announces Organics by CMI. Beginning with the new crop apple season, CMI will offer the Earthbound Farm label and the new CMI label. The new organic CMI packaging includes high-graphic boxes, 3- and 5-pound bagged apples, cherry clamshell labels and over-sized organic PLU stickers.



Reader Service No. 318

### ON THE WEB

#### GIUMARRA REDESIGNS WEB SITE

The Giumarra Companies, Los Angeles, CA, has launched its redesigned Web site. It has a new, sleek design that expresses the company's personality and emphasizes its Italian heritage. It offers increased functionality, enhanced site navigation and detailed product information including descriptions, availability, packing specifications and more.



Reader Service No. 320

### HAB TARGETS TAILGATING

The Hass Avocado Board, Irvine, CA, will promote avocados as the perfect addition to tailgate feasting. The promotion will be supported by television commercials, online advertising and a consumer sweepstakes. Grand prize is a trip for four to the Rose Bowl on New Year's Day. Nine first place winners receive a Coleman Road Trip Grille LXE.



Reader Service No. 311

### TRUCKING APPOINTMENTS SYSTEM

Tanimura & Antle, Inc., Salinas, CA, is offering a trucking Appointments system built on a platform that uses state-of-the-art scheduling technologies. The system interacts with forecast technology to anticipate when product will be ready for harvest. The product is tracked into the system and slated for a particular shipment before it arrives into inventory.



Reader Service No. 313

### CUSTOM PACKAGING SOLUTION

Conwed Global Netting Solutions, Minneapolis, MN, has been selected as the netting bag supplier for PureHeart Seedless Watermelon bagged product from Dulcinea Farms LLC, Ladera, CA. The netted header bags hold one or two mini watermelons. The flexible mesh provides protection from bruising while letting consumers view the product.



Reader Service No. 315

### SUN-WORLD EARTHQUAKE RELIEF

Sun-World International, Bakersfield, CA, is responding to international requests to help the victims of the devastating earthquake that ravished Peru in August. With agricultural ties to Peru's ICA region, Sun-World has established a sales-based recovery initiative. A portion of the proceeds from sales of Peruvian Minneolas will go directly to those in Peru who need it most.



Reader Service No. 317

### DISNEY GARDEN OFFERS POTATOES

Imagination Farms, LLC, Indianapolis, IN, continues to expand the distribution of the Disney Garden brand with the addition of a comprehensive potato category, supplied by Rigby Produce, Rigby, ID, and Russet Potato Exchange, Bancroft, WI. The use of the Disney Garden brand will open up opportunities to market potato health attributes to children.



Reader Service No. 319

### ON THE WEB

#### NEW BLOG AT DEARDORFF

Deardorff Family Farms, Oxnard, CA, has added a blog to its Web site in order to better communicate with customers and the general public. It will provide the most up-to-date information on Deardorff's products and methods of production. The company endorses sustainable farming practices and the blog provides a real-time tool way to communicate this.



Reader Service No. 321

Produce Watch is a regular feature of PRODUCE BUSINESS. Please send information on new products, personnel changes, industry, corporate and personal milestones and available literature, along with a color photo, slide or transparency to: Managing Editor, PRODUCE BUSINESS, P.O. Box 810425, Boca Raton, FL 33481-0425, or e-mail us at [ProduceBusiness@phoenixmedianet.com](mailto:ProduceBusiness@phoenixmedianet.com)



*Watson, It's amazing how your delicious berries stay so very fresh in the fridge. I'm curious, do you add anything to them? I won't tell anyone.*

*Madeleine*

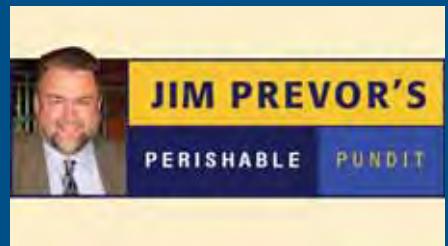
*Madeleine, *Nope. Nothing artificial.*  
So, you can tell anyone you want; even Mother Nature.*

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# Wegmans, Wal-Mart And Media Bias



From Jim Prevor's *Perishable Pundit*, Sept. 18, 2007

You have to wonder if some mornings the folks who work for Wal-Mart must ask themselves what they are doing wrong. Here they are, a great company that has provided millions of jobs and helped a lot of people on tight budgets, and every time they go to open a store, there are protesters and political opposition.

On the other hand, Wegmans goes to open a store — at 132,000-square-feet, not all that much smaller than a Wal-Mart Supercenter — and *The Patriot-News* [a central Pennsylvania newspaper] runs an article entitled, *Disney World of Supermarkets*.

On the newspaper's Web sit, the editors actually run a photo of Cinderella's castle at Disneyland with a caption stating that this photo is "What the new Wegmans may look like to an overly excited shopper." The Web site piece is run in the *Entertainment* section and goes on to note:

*Every year, Wegmans receives about 5,000 "love letters" from shoppers pleading for one to open in their town. For five years running, Harrisburg was at the top of the request list.*

*Sunday at 7 AM dream becomes reality when the newest Wegmans opens at 6416 Carlisle Pike in the Silver Spring Square.*

*While you count the hours until the doors swing open, Sue Gleiter has been inside the magic kingdom perusing the 400 types of cheese, the 700 produce items, the Market Cafe, the Patisserie, the seafood bar and the Nature's Marketplace for her scouting report in today's Life section of The Patriot-News.*

*Big crowds are expected for the grand opening and, we're not kidding, tailgating in the parking lot.*

*"Some people have described it as being like a rock concert," said Wegmans spokeswoman Jo Natale. "We*

*don't know what to expect. It's not unusual to have more than 1,000 people lined up at 7 AM."*

The actual article is even more glowing:

*Consider: Fresh seafood delivered daily with selections such as little neck clams from Virginia and seafood from Maryland, stone crab claws from Key West, FL, and diver scallops from Maine.*

*At least 400 types of cheese, many imported from around*



**What the new Wegmans may look like to an overly excited shopper.**



**All photos from the Grand Opening in Silver Spring Square**



Photos courtesy of PennLive.com

the world with an emphasis on Italian cheeses.

More than 700 produce items including about 100 organic items.

It's a long time coming for those who have traveled to the closest megasupermarkets in Downingtown near Philadelphia or Hunt Valley in Maryland.

"It just might be the catalyst that will make me cross that river regularly. I am like a kid on Christmas Eve — I cannot wait," said Gretchen Yarnall of Harrisburg.

Wegmans has been called the Disney World of supermarkets. It's certainly large enough — 132,000 square feet.

Others have said it's like the Nordstrom of food shopping for the large number of specialty items and attention to customer service.

Shoppers, some on bus trips, have been known to drive hours, with coolers in tow, just to shop at the stores. It's a destination as much as a place for people to buy groceries.

No matter whether groceries mean rare European cheeses, \$499/a pound truffles (under lock and key) and wild salmon from British Columbia or Oreos, Wheaties and Jif peanut butter.

You'll find the usual supermarket departments at Wegmans — bakery, meat and seafood, deli, health foods, pharmacy, digital photo center, floral department, magazines, books and greeting cards. That's where the similarities end. Take, for instance, these signature Wegman's offerings:

- *Market Cafe* — European-style marketplace with soups, gourmet sandwiches, salads, ready-to-heat entrées and sides, sushi, subs, specialty coffees, Asian wokery and pizza with seating for 300 guests in a garden-theme cafe with patio.

- *Patisserie* — A French pastry shop developed with Chef Pierre Hermes, known as France's top pastry chef. Wegmans



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*Market Leader  
Rich Castroville Soil  
Proprietary Varieties  
More Meat  
Bigger Hearts  
Large Volume*

**EXPECT MORE.**





also has created its own line of chocolates including truffles.

• Produce — The chain builds partnerships with local farmers such as Oak Grove Farms in Monroe Twp. and Paulus Farm Market in Upper Allen Twp. to bring in homegrown vegetables and fruits.

• Seafood Bar — A new concept for Wegmans. A 12-seat bar where customers place an order and watch their meal prepared. Includes oysters on the half shell, shrimp, scallops and various fresh fish cooked and served with sauces such as citrus soy and horseradish cream.

• Nature's Marketplace — Natural foods, supplements, herbal remedies, cleaning products, cosmetics and foods for special dietary needs.

• Complements: The housewares section carries Kitchen Aid, All Clad, Good Grips, Le Creuset and Reidel Crystal.

Wegmans' pricing strategy is accepted pretty uncritically:

Wegmans follows a "consistent low price" strategy. It does not issue weekly sales circulars or buy-one-get-one-free promotions.

Yet it was not just one mesmerized reporter. The same newspaper ran another article on the same store opening even more exuberant than the first:

Kim Reimels stood out among the more than 8,000 people who had poured into the new Wegmans store by 3 pm Sunday.

The Hampden Twp. woman didn't just walk into the 132,000-square-foot store in Silver Spring Twp. She exuberantly danced in.

She didn't just talk sedately. She squealed with delight upon finding golden raspberries, Sahlen's hot dogs, Weber's mustard and Reeses Klondike bars.

And Reimels didn't just wander around aimlessly, bewildered by 70,000 items. She had memorized the layout after visiting the store Web site.

"I have Wegmanmania," she admitted. "I'm at home here."

The store manager reports that the community was showing great enthusiasm:

"People stayed in our parking lot overnight," said Kevin Lang, store manager. "We had 2,000 people at the doors when we opened at 7 am. We did the 'Wegman's Cheer.' Then we let the people in to shop." And shop they did.

The produce department also inspired this shopper:

When she saw light-green cactus leaves, light-orange horn melons and brown lychee nuts in the produce section, she swooned.

Although even this shopper has limits:

But she resisted buying what might be the most expensive food item in the store, Burgundy truffles for \$299 a pound.

The newspaper also posted a short side show of opening day photos.

Wegmans is a terrific operator and a beautiful concept. When Pundit friends visit from around the world, we never fail to include

Wegmans on the list of "must see" stores.

Just the other day we were praising Wegmans organic research farm, which is a model for homegrown and organic. Dave Corsi, vice president of produce, is a class act, on the Board of PMA and as co-founder of the Buyer-led Food Safety Initiative, he is certainly pushing the envelope to achieve things for his company and the industry.

Yet some of its success, as with all retailers, is a function of choosing locations wisely. In the first article, there is a comment that... It's a long time coming for those who have traveled to the closest megastore in Downingtown near Philadelphia or Hunt Valley in Maryland.

In the second some shoppers are quoted: Orin and Jean Long of Mechanicsburg, who had just bought a cedar-wrapped pork tenderloin, saw "stuff we never saw before.... Put another way, it is like an oasis in a desert.

We know plenty of people who report they often go out to eat dinner at Wegmans, saying it is the best restaurant in town. But these are typically residents of more rural areas where a Wegmans really adds something exciting to the area.

Still, all this talk about customers who have "exuberantly danced" into the store, who "squeal with delight" and who "swoon" over the produce tells us less about the quality of Wegmans than about the cultural predisposition of the media.

They have no interest in doing a story on how the arrival of a Wal-Mart Supercenter lowers the prices in a community so that a poor family can buy new shoes for school this year. They don't know or care what it means for a 15-year-old boy whose mom squeezes out only enough to buy some decent athletic shoes at Wal-Mart. They don't have interest in a story about how much better a poor kid can feel about going to school because he has an extra change of clothes and doesn't get made fun of for wearing the same things every day.

The Pundit is proud to have a brother who, after a stint in the family's produce company, has devoted his life to building a company [Steve & Barry's] that makes it easier for families to afford decent clothes and a decent life.

We appreciate Wegmans and enjoy every visit we can make to the stores. To stand in a Wegmans is to know a pinnacle of our civilization, a system that can gather the best from the smallest borough on the earth



and bring it to one place. But we appreciate Wal-Mart, too. When we stand in a Wal-Mart, we stand amidst another pinnacle of human achievement. To supply so many with so much so inexpensively is a magnificent thing to behold.

The media truly do a horrible disservice to the country when they get carried away with one kind of achievement and neglect the other.

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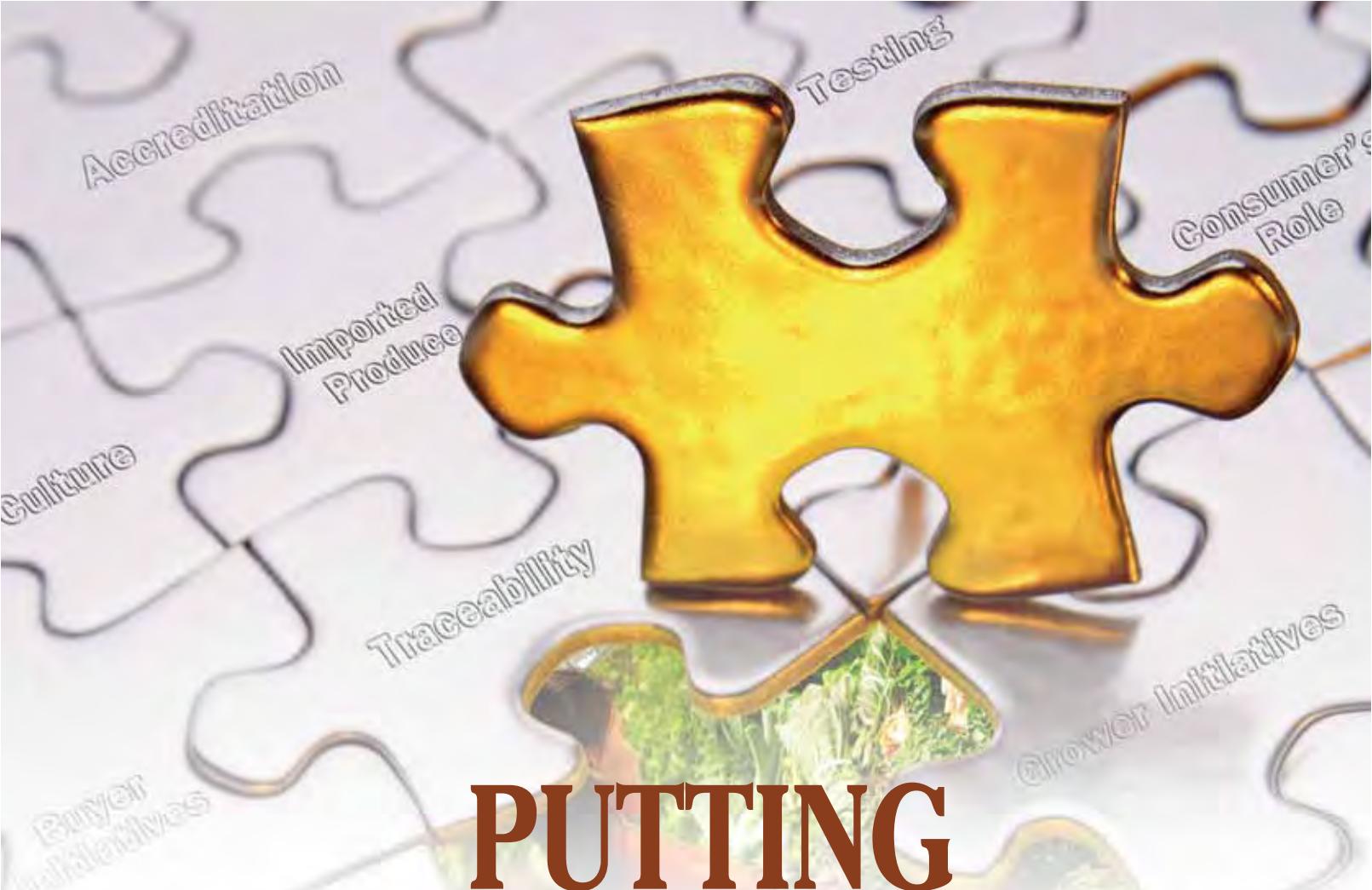
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Reader Service # 43



# PUTTING The Pieces Together

*Food-safety solutions require multifaceted approach.*

BY BOB GATTY

**W**hen the headlines hit, they hit hard. Repercussions are serious and can have a costly and lasting impact on every company in the industry. Public confidence has been shaken and putting the pieces back together requires hard work, dedication and open minds.

Explanations don't matter, even if it's later proven consumers themselves were at fault — they ate something after it was out of date code, for example. Impressions remain in the public mind, causing confidence to plummet.

It also doesn't help when news stories report health hazards from imported foods, although a recent survey shows most consumers differentiate between domestically produced and foreign-sourced food.

Another consequence of consumer worries about food safety is the response from government, especially politically sensitive members of Congress. Legislative proposals paper Capitol Hill committee rooms. Representatives and senators hold hearings excoriating the industry and government regulators. More publicity results, and industry representatives must respond, expending precious time and resources.

Responding to last year's deaths and the subsequent recall of spinach products, the California leafy greens industry adopted new standards to

prevent such an event from occurring again. Yet, there is more to do.

What will it take to put the pieces of this puzzle back together? Perhaps, eventually, a federally mandated industry-wide system that can minimize future crises resulting from tainted produce. A foolproof system? Doubtful, probably not possible — but it must be a system that will give consumers every reason to be confident the food they purchase is safe.

In the articles that follow, PRODUCE BUSINESS examines many facets of food safety in the produce industry — imports, cultural issues, grower and buying organization initiatives, the government, testing programs, traceability, accreditation and consumer education.

The conclusion? This industry is entirely serious about preventing, ever again, anything like another spinach *E. coli* 0157:H7 catastrophe. There is recognition that cooperation and communication along the supply chain is essential, as is cooperation, not confrontation, with lawmakers and regulators.

In such an atmosphere, better systems of produce safety could well become a reality.

On the following pages, you will find the remarkable body of work that this industry has thus far achieved as it seeks to meet its responsibilities to the world's fresh produce consumers.



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## IMPORTED PRODUCE

*Imported Produce — A Question Of Confidence* ..... page 30

American consumers are growing increasingly wary of foreign products and want tougher safeguards for imported fruits and vegetables.

A poll released in September at Iowa State University, Ames, IA, shows 85 percent of Americans have confidence in the safety of local and regional food systems but only 12 percent felt that way about imported food.

"There's a feeling out there that somehow imported food is more of a problem than domestic food," says Kathy Means, vice president of government relations, Produce Marketing Association (PMA), Newark DE, "but none of those perceptions have been borne out of studies done by the government. We have to be very clear in letting the public know imported produce already meets our standards."

Ten times more foreign produce than domestic produce is actually inspected, notes Lee Frankel, president, Fresh Produce Association of the Americas (FPAA), Nogales, AZ. The group opposes proposed legislation that would levy users' fees of \$250 to \$500 per container on imported produce.

## CREATING A FOOD SAFETY CULTURE

*Food Safety Culturally Ingrained* ..... page 32

To create an effective food safety culture, says Frank Yiannas, director of safety & health for Lake Buena Vista, FL-based Walt Disney World, "You need to change the way people think, behave and believe around food."

Produce suppliers and retailers are in various stages of recognizing the need for dramatic changes in corporate culture to build a culture friendly to food safety. While there are no guarantees of total perfection, industry leaders believe such cultural changes are contributing to an environment that helps make consumers safer today than before last year's spinach outbreak.

Buying organizations and foodservice operators are also instituting mandates providing incentives to employers who exercise good safety practices.

The ultimate goal is to justify consumer confidence. "We want food safety to be invisible to our members," says Craig Wilson, assistant vice president of food safety and quality assurance for Costco Wholesale Corp., Issaquah, WA. "We don't want anybody to get sick or for them to have any considerations about the quality of the foods they buy from us."

## GROWER INITIATIVES

*Paradigm Shift At Commodity Board Level* ..... page 38

The change in the culture of fresh produce agriculture appears to be rippling through every segment of the supply chain, as industry groups define rapidly evolving Good Agricultural Practices and Best Manufacturing Practices.

Producer-led initiatives include the Fresno, CA-based California Tomato Farmers cooperative working with the Maitland, FL-based Florida Tomato Committee for a unified approach to the implementation and verification of GAP in the tomato industry.

Industry leaders emphasize science-based solutions through cooperation among producers, processors, academic researchers and regulators and stress the need for effective education and communication.

Growers have invested millions of dollars to update filtration systems and develop new packing-line sheds, state-of-the-art wash systems and extensive training.

## BUYING ORGANIZATION INITIATIVES

*On The Front Line — Buyers Of Produce Hold the Key* ..... page 42

The leaders of large buying organizations understand insuring safety is driven by the best science they can access. They push growers to follow the right standards and implement the proper procedures.

"We are all thinking and living food safety," notes Tim York, president, Markon Cooperative, Salinas, CA. "The industry is voluntarily regulating itself. There's been a real change of mindset."

Testing is critical yet difficult. False positives can be an expensive problem and cause lost trust between buyers and sellers. Still, industry

participants recognize the far more serious consequences of a contaminated product reaching the marketplace.

## GOVERNMENT

*Finding Government's Place* ..... page 46

While even the federal government acknowledges it is impossible to guarantee a completely safe food supply, regulators and lawmakers take seriously their responsibility to do their part.

In three articles, we explore "government's place" as it seeks to assure a safe food supply, discussing current policies and procedures, pending legislation and a new USDA Internet site to help small food processors.

While there is always reluctance to back federal involvement in industry affairs, Carter McEntire, vice president for McEntire Produce in Columbia, SC, puts it this way, "We need to put some more coins in the trust bucket with the consumers."

## TESTING

*Testing For Pathogens* ..... page 52

While testing for pathogens may not be foolproof, it is an important component of the food-safety effort.

There is debate among some industry experts over the practical value of testing, but it is clear that testing can help prevent serious problems, as was the case when Salinas, CA-based Nunes Company voluntarily recalled product last October after water tests found *E. coli*.

We discuss how various tests work and their attributes, procedures to be followed and recommendations for improvement.

## TRACEABILITY

*Keeping Track* ..... page 54

The ability to trace perishable food products from field to consumer, while complex, is a critical link in the food-safety chain.

Industry organizations are developing recommendations for industry-wide traceability standards, and experts say common and uniform standards across the industry are critical.

However, some companies are using proprietary systems that, while effective for them, may not help the industry at large when a crisis occurs.

Technology, of course, plays an important role here, and we discuss what some companies are doing.

## ACCREDITATION

*Certifiably Safe* ..... page 56

An important aspect of any fresh produce food-safety program is the standards involved in the granting of either accreditation or certification of suppliers and other food safety "partners."

Who conducts the audits? What standards are used? Are auditors professionally trained and knowledgeable about produce versus other perishable products?

We discuss methods that some successful companies use to develop an efficient and effective certification program.

## THE CONSUMER'S ROLE

*The Consumer Responsibility* ..... page 60

Food safety is a field-to-fork effort that requires the entire supply chain to do its part, including the consumer.

While reports say consumers have improved safe handling practices, there is room for them to do better — especially when it comes to handling fresh produce.

Thus, many industry entities have developed outreach programs to help inform consumers so all of the work done to keep produce safe from contamination is not wasted because of a consumer mistake.

The federal government, working with the private sector, has developed a major food-safety consumer education program that can be used by all segments of the food industry.

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Reader Service # 84

# Imported Produce — A Question Of Confidence

*Meeting industry standards and traceability are key to restoring consumer confidence.*

By LISA LIEBERMAN

**I**n light of recent food safety scares involving food products from China, American consumers are growing increasingly wary of foreign products and believe there should be tougher safeguards for imported fruits and vegetables. Many industry experts, however, contend that imported produce is at least as safe as anything produced in the United States.

"Since the Chinese incident, there's definitely been a lot more pressure by consumer groups and from the government to have more inspections," says Kathy Means, PMA vice president of government relations. "There's a feeling out there that somehow imported food is more of a problem than domestic food, but none of those perceptions have been borne out of studies done by the government. We have to be very clear in letting the public know that imported produce already meets our standards."

A poll released in September by the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University, Ames, IA, found 85 percent have confidence in the safety of their local and regional food systems, but only 12 percent were confident in the safety of food from elsewhere in the world.

On average, just under 1 percent of foreign produce coming across U.S. borders gets inspected, says Lee Frankel, president, Fresh Produce Association of the Americas (FPAA), Nogales, AZ. But, he points out, the amount of domestic produce FDA tests is only  $\frac{1}{10}$  of 1 percent.

"Foreign imported fruits are inspected at six times the frequency of domestic fruits, and imported vegetables are inspected at 11 times the rate of domestic vegetables, according to the most recent FDA annual report on pesticide residue monitoring report," Frankel explains. "The fact is that on the relative scale of activity, the FDA has always felt more comfortable regulating, stopping and rejecting imports than they have domestic produce."

Frankel says FPAA opposes legislation currently being considered by the U.S. Congress that would levy users' fees of \$250 to \$500 per container on imported produce. "We're opposed to that, especially if the fee is only going to apply to imports. If it were a universal fee and

applied both to foreign and domestic produce, it would be more palatable. As it is, this would be an unfair barrier for foreign producers."

Frankel believes such a fee would also be a regressive tax on consumers who would be forced to spend a higher percentage of their income for food safety, which, he contends, should be financed out of the general fund.

Before imposing users' fees on producers or raising taxes to bolster food-safety standards, the government could consolidate different segments of the FDA to improve efficiency, Frankel says, noting FDA's responsibility for fruits and vegetables falls under several different divisions of the FDA, including the Office of Regulatory Affairs, Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition, Division of Import Operations, and the International Affairs Office.

"Each of these divisions has competent people within its offices, but sometimes it's difficult for the FDA to make a decision because the issues get lost in the shuffle, and no one feels responsible. It would be better if we just had one division responsible for produce," Frankel says.

John Pandol, marketing specialist at Pandol Bros., Delano, CA, agrees the FDA needs to become more efficient. However, he adds, even tighter government regulation will not necessarily guarantee safer produce, noting that the United States imports 7 billion pounds of produce from Mexico alone, making it impossible to inspect every shipment.

"It's not about minimizing food-safety risks," he says, contending that many of the proposed regulations are about reducing liability for food safety at the cost of mountains of paperwork. "I think more than anything else, there's this big emphasis on visual emphasis of food safety," Pandol says. "So, you might make a big display by having an army of people wearing white smocks at the entrance of a packing house, but



if I test my well water once a month instead of once a year for contaminants, there's no visual evidence of that."

## TRACEABILITY IS CRITICAL

Even if the government tried to address every possible aspect of food safety, there is no practical way to do it, according to Pandol, who points out many buyers source their products from anonymous intermediary brokers.

"One of the dirty little secrets of the year-around supplier is that they do a lot of spot buying, where they buy produce from repack facilities where they can't trace the produce back to the growers," Pandol says.

Ultimately, the only way buyers can be certain they are receiving safe, traceable produce is to buy directly from producers who take responsibility for their own food safety, according to Pandol, who imports 40 percent of his produce and grows the rest domestically. He contracts with a third party inspector who monitors the growing and packing conditions of both his foreign and domestic produce.

Pat Davis, president of the North American Perishable Agricultural Receivers (NAPAR), Washington, D.C., says many major produce companies employ third party inspectors abroad, but contends the real issue for ensuring food safety is traceability. "There's a need to be very prepared in the event of a product recall,"



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he says. "You can't be left not knowing where you bought your produce."

Arlington, VA-based Food Marketing Institute (FMI), the umbrella organization for NAPAR, offers a program called Safe Quality Food (SQF), on which many retailers are insisting. Through SQF, food suppliers around the world can have their food-safety systems audited by an authorized inspection company, licensed by SQF.

Davis points out technologies, such as radio frequency identification (RFID), can increase traceability and are being implemented by some larger producers. With RFID, a small chip attached to each case of produce provides detailed information about the precise source of the produce.

"Right now, this technology is just used for pallets, but chips could be put into cases and even into individual consumer packs," Davis explains, "but there's a cost that goes along with it, and it's an expensive proposition."

Regardless of the process, the ultimate goal with produce, foreign or domestic, is to know its source and ultimate destination, says Christopher Ciruli, COO of Ciruli Bros. in Tubac, AZ.

"You want to know where you're getting the stuff from, starting at the farm level and going to the distributor — whether it's to foodservice or a chain store," Ciruli explains, noting that all his growers in Mexico, as well as the warehouses they use, are certified by Primus Labs.com, Santa Maria, CA, a widely used, private third-party inspection contractor.

"The vast majority of the players out of Mexico are third-party certified, too," Ciruli says. "We're dealing with large companies that are farming hundreds, maybe thousands, of acres, that have too much at stake for any kind of stoppages. So, they take the extra steps they need to make sure their produce is safe."

To improve its ability to trace foreign produce, this year Ciruli Bros. instituted a system that tracks the precise location of inbound trucks from Mexico every 30 minutes. "We've also required all the drivers to know some basic English and be able to respond to questions in English when they enter the port of Nogales," Ciruli adds. "This has been difficult, especially because we've had a shortage of drivers across the board."

Ciruli is also making other changes to com-

ply with the Automated Commercial Environment (ACE), a U.S. Customs and Border Protection Agency program designed to help buyers and shippers track produce shipments electronically at both the port and national levels.

## LEVEL THE PLAYING FIELD

Meanwhile, new protocols and resulting fees may be in the offing. According to FPAA's Frankel, officials in the United States, Mexico and Canada are developing a set of standardized food-safety protocols that would put all three countries on an even playing field.

"We need to create some common standards across the board so you don't have a system with lot of loopholes for local producers and stricter policies that effect producers from other countries," he says. "It's a general concern of ours that we have cooperation among the three countries and to make sure we don't come up with anything that's going to turn into trade barriers."

With possible changes in shipping protocols ahead, user fees may well increase, Ciruli suggests. "We're going to have fees — there's no way around it," he says, adding the burden should be shared across the industry. **pb**

# Food Safety Culturally Ingrained

*Putting action behind words creates a culture of consumer protection.*

BY LIZ PARKS

**P**roduce suppliers and retailers are taking a number of initiatives to enhance food safety, including implementing more best practice initiatives throughout the supply chain, from the farm to retail stores, restaurants and even theme parks.

While instituting food-safety best practices from farm to consumer is clearly one of the most direct and meaningful ways to enhance food safety, informed sources point out the companies that do this implement effective training and auditing procedures to make sure everyone — from growers to shippers to food preparers in delis and restaurants — understands exactly how raw food should be handled. Done properly, this helps create a food-safety culture, which experts hold is an essential prerequisite for sustaining truly successful food-safety programs.

"Some companies are much more evolved when it comes to a food-safety culture than others," says Tim York, president of Salinas, CA-

based Markon Cooperative, a produce-purchasing agent for the foodservice industry, "but I think everybody gets it. Everybody knows we have to have a culture of food safety."

That culture must start at the top of every organization, in the executive suite. "It has to be the guy at the top who says food safety is important. He shows he means it by his decision-making process, by training, by testing and supporting things like the California Leafy Greens Handler Marketing Agreement and by investing in more fences where needed and creating testing programs," he says. "That's how you demonstrate to your people that you are serious about food safety."

To create an effective food safety culture, says Frank Yiannas, director of safety & health for Lake Buena Vista, FL-based Walt Disney World, "You need to change the way people think, behave and believe around food."

Disney World managers, he says, are trained

"to manage performance by using positive feedback, certificates and also giving performance awards to catch people doing things right."

A similar program exists at Calabasas Hills, CA-based The Cheesecake Factory, where bonuses of restaurant managers are based on regular audits. In an extensive interview on PERISHABLEPUNDIT.COM, Kit McGinnis, vice president of kitchen operations, said, "Individuals at the company who receive bonuses are rewarded or penalized based on their records of upholding company food-safety standards."

According to McGinnis, The Cheesecake Factory has a rigorous inspection policy that far exceeds industry standards.

## SITUATION HAS IMPROVED

Craig Wilson, assistant vice president of food safety and quality assurance, Costco Wholesale Corp., Issaquah, WA, believes there has been demonstrable improvement over the past year. "I

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think a lot of things have caused improvements. Producers are paying much better attention to the quality of the items they are putting out. Food safety has become a huge priority."

Cas Tryba, director of food safety for the 56-unit Big Y Foods, Inc., based in Springfield, MA, sees cooperation throughout the supply chain as companies seek to enhance food safety. Retailers and suppliers are "working together as an industry. It's a bigger issue than just one company. Everybody's in the same boat, and so, as a retailer, we are working with FMI, our trade association, to try to get best practices and a game plan in place that all of retail and all of the produce industry can accept. And since September 2006, there's been a bunch of changes to enhance food safety as produce moves out of the field and into the supply chain."

#### OUTBREAKS PREVENTED

Supply-chain cooperation works. Just this past August, a new food-safety program put in place by a grower — partly in response to the requests of several large retail customers including Costco — prevented *salmonella*-contaminated spinach from slipping into many retail stores.

Metz Fresh, Salinas, CA, discovered the contamination while doing finished-products microbial testing on its spinach. There were no reports of illness as a result of the spinach, which Metz

Fresh voluntarily recalled before it hit many retail shelves.

Following the September 2006 spinach *E. coli* outbreak, Costco refused to buy or sell spinach until the produce industry implemented new food-safety best practices Costco requested — including a set of microbial "test and hold"

produce from reaching Costco's shelves.

#### ON THE FARM

In addition, more than 99 percent of leafy greens handlers in California have signed the California Leafy Green Handlers Marketing Agreement, spearheaded and championed by Irvine, CA-based Western Growers Association (WGA). WGA represents farmers in Arizona and California who grow, pack and ship nearly one-half of the nation's fresh fruits, vegetables and nuts. California produces 75 to 80 percent of all lettuce and leafy green produce.

According to Markon's York, if growers who voluntarily sign the Marketing Agreement fail to follow the mandatory best practices, they face significant dollar penalties. The procedural guidelines focus on "where, how and how frequently growers test their water," he says, "with specific tolerances for the water, guidelines for land use and adjacencies, crop treatments — for example, how manure must be composted — are among the requirements in the Agreement."

That about 90 percent of 8,118 cases of contaminated spinach was found this past August before it could reach most stores is "proof that the agreement is working," York notes.

WGA president and CEO Tom Nassif calls the Marketing Agreement "the first step in a multi-pronged approach to enhance food safety."

**That [food-safety]  
culture must start at  
the top of  
every organization,  
in the executive suite.**

guidelines for bagged, ready-to-eat spinach.

"We decided it was not appropriate to start selling spinach again when everybody was continuing to do the same things they did before the recall in September 2006," explains Wilson. "Spinach vendors can't ship to us until they have their microbial test results back." He estimates the microbial test program has stopped at least three or four loads of contaminated leafy

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WGA is spearheading an effort to put a similar Marketing Agreement in place in Arizona where leafy greens are grown during the winter. The goal is for it to be ready in time for the harvest season this November.

Steps are also underway in California to create a similar voluntary marketing agreement for the tomato growing industry, and procedural guidelines mandating how tomatoes should be grown and audited could be in place by this coming spring, says York. Similar standards have been established in Florida.

Costco's Wilson, however, emphasizes that these and other initiatives, including microbial

test-and-hold programs "are not silver bullets." It gets down to the basics. Food safety depends on how you wash it, how you harvest it, how you grow it, and the things we are learning now from new programs such as 'Test and Hold' are helping producers get better, but everyone including the consumer has a role to play in food safety."

Costco has what industry sources consider a "state-of-the-art food safety training program." All its managers go through a 16-hour home-study course and eight hours of in-class training for food safety. "We have a complete retail HACCP [Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point Plan], along with Standard Sanitation Operating

Procedures in each Costco," explains Wilson, adding that several states use Costco's food-safety program in their food-safety training.

## EXECUTIVE SUPPORT

Big Y's Tryba stresses the importance of executive-level insistence on food safety as a top priority and providing the necessary training and tools to make that priority a reality. "It starts at the top and if everybody in the company is dedicated to food safety and associates are not hearing it from just a single voice, then that's very helpful," he says.

Big Y, notes Tryba, has developed a series of in-house computer-based food safety training modules its associates can access both from a training center — a "learning hub" that is in every store" — and from home, just by logging into the Big Y network. "They are allocated time to go into these modules, view them and then

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**In what may seem strange in an era where marketing seems to rule, both Big Y and Costco have never tried to market their food-safety programs or to present them to the public as value-added benefits for consumers.**

they have to pass a series of tests," he says.

In addition, all perishable department managers and store management personnel go through a 15-hour training and certification program and must pass a nationally approved test.

Big Y also audits its associates and cites them whenever violations occur. But prevention is the main goal, says Tryba, "so we spend a lot of time educating our associates and our managers for job specific functions, and on top of that, we have our web-based training programs to give them additional information."

In what may seem strange in an era where marketing seems to rule, both Big Y and Costco have never tried to market their food-safety programs or to present them to the public as value-added benefits for consumers.

"We want food safety to be invisible to our members," says Wilson. "We want members to come into a Costco and find it sparkling like a brand new penny, and the last thing we want our members to think about is food safety. We want them to have a wonderful shopping experience, and we don't want anybody to get sick or have any considerations about the quality of the foods they buy from us."

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# Paradigm Shift At Commodity Board Level

*Industry commodity groups pull together to improve food-safety performance.*

BY MEREDITH AUERBACH

**T**he September 2006 spinach crisis was a watershed event, changing the premise and culture of the fresh produce industry.

Relationships between farmers, processors, buyers, distributors and regulators have changed substantially. Commodity boards have shifted primary focus from promotion to food safety, offering new levels of education and support to their members. The Florida Tomato Committee, Maitland, FL, went to legislators demanding mandatory regulation; California tomato growers started California Tomato Farmers, Fresno, CA, centered on food safety and quality.

The change is a paradigm shift rippling through all segments of the supply chain. All groups are working intensively and cooperatively to define and elaborate rapidly evolving Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) and Best Manufac-

turing Practices (BMP), while recognizing that different commodities and different geographies demand different approaches and procedures.

Growers, sellers and buyers fervently believe the best solutions to the challenges of science-based food safety will come from the industry itself rather than from the government.

Ed Beckman, formerly president of the California Tomato Commission, heads California Tomato Farmers, a grower-owned cooperative founded this past spring. "Our growers, representing 90 percent of California fresh market tomatoes, have a primary goal of standardized food-safety criteria to be developed and implemented in all U.S. growing areas eventually extending to Canada and Mexico. We're working closely with Florida Tomatoes to have a unified approach to the implementation and verification

of GAP in the fresh tomato industry. Our groups have agreed to mandatory USDA inspections and audits. Florida's mandatory state-sanctioned inspection program starts this fall; to date, the only government-mandated program. Eighty-five million cartons of field-grown tomatoes marketed from the two states are under mandatory regulation of farming and packing operations.

"We're working closely with FDA to pay more attention to the processing of fresh tomatoes and to define and improve cold-chain management for tomatoes so processors don't raise the risk of contamination during pre-cut processing," he continues.

In September, he says, the organization started work on upgrading repack operations within the United Fresh Produce Association, Washington, D.C., workgroup.

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Industry leaders emphasize the need for science-based solutions achieved through cooperation between producers, processors, academic researchers and regulators as well as the need for effective education and communication.

Mark Murai, president, California Strawberry Commission (CSC), Watsonville, CA, concurs. "We were one of the first to develop commodity-specific food-safety programs, taking the process beyond regular audits and helping to change the growing culture. We've undertaken a huge education project for our growers to provide help in how to implement the new prac-

tices and procedures of our GAPs, such as our DVD on water testing and more pictorial and graphic training tools at field level to deal with language differences."

CSC is also working to identify where help is needed. "There's a whole new generation of farmers who understand the social responsibility that's part of providing safe wholesome products the length of the supply chain but need help in covering all the bases," he says.

### INDUSTRY COOPERATION

Industry leaders link the rapid progress made

this year to unprecedented levels of good will, good faith and teamwork.

The Almond Board of California, Modesto, CA, hoped to have a full pasteurization process in place by Sept. 1, says Richard Waycott, president, but validated capacity was insufficient and requested an extension. "USDA did not change the deadline but worked with us to allow capacity that is still in the process of validation to be used," he says. "It's been a collaborative effort."

Tim York, president of Markon Cooperative, Salinas, CA, also acknowledges the efforts and achievements of producers. "The production side has done a remarkable job to develop market-driven solutions, moving at business speed, not government speed. Look at the efforts and success of Tom Nassif [president and CEO] of Western Growers [Association (WGA) Irvine, CA], in putting together the California Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement. In less than a year, it is in place with a professional staff leading compliance among 115 members."

The organization, officially known as the California Leafy Green Product Handler Marketing Board, Sacramento, CA, and led by new CEO Scott Horsfall, is responsible for inspecting handlers and growers in specific areas of GAP such as water, environmental assessment, soil amendments, crop treatments, harvest equipment and harvest and field personnel.

"We have 10 USDA-trained auditors and the audits are well underway," Horsfall reports, "There is intensive documentation and record-keeping of all audits. Thus far the auditors are finding correction items but none that pose a risk to consumers. The industry has a positive attitude about the progress to date. CDFA [California Department of Food and Agriculture, Sacramento, CA, which administers the program] applauds this industry-led initiative. We continue to review all research and assess the findings. Our job to communicate to all the constituencies is big and growing."

### INCREASED SAFETY, INCREASED COSTS

Costs will continue to climb, says California Tomato's Beckman. "Huge investments are being made as growers update filtration systems, develop new packing-line sheds and state-of-the-art wash systems. There's more extensive training. I'm not sure the trade understands the cost and impact of all the changes. We've raised the bar on safety but it has raised the bar on costs that will flow throughout the supply chain."

The consensus on the production side is that the industry is doing a much better job of protecting food safety, but it is far from done.

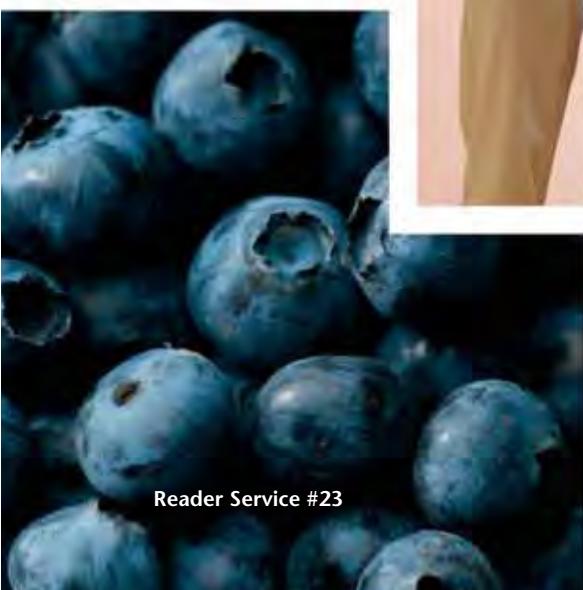
All aspects are evolving, from science to infrastructure to how findings get implemented and turned into measurable metrics. The sense is each individual, and each company, is responsible and accountable for a safe food supply. **pb**

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# On The Front Line — Buyers Of Produce Hold The Key

*Buyers are setting high standards to assure safety.*

By MEREDITH AUERBACH

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**T**his is America. On big issues of the times, you can count on as many opinions as there are participants. Food safety — and the best way to achieve it — is no exception. In the produce arena, what distinguishes the discussion is the understanding and acceptance that all sides have good intentions and are working intensively to get the job done right.

The leaders of large buying organizations labor in the middle ground between producers, processors, end users such as restaurants and, finally, consumers, the industry's ultimate customers. The challenge of insuring safety is heavy and increasingly driven by the best science they can access. But is it enough?

Tim York, president, Markon Cooperative, Salinas CA, believes a market-driven solution is most effective. "At Markon, we constantly push our growers to meet the standards of Good Agricultural Practices [GAP]. You don't need to be a scientist to have basic measures — specific measurable and verifiable standards — in place."

In York's view, "The best approach is prevention with tight focused attention to GAP and raw product testing."

Craig Wilson, assistant vice president of food safety and quality assurance, Costco Wholesale Corp., Issaquah, WA, describes the company's history following the September 2006 spinach recall: "All our bagged produce is ready to eat and we don't see any reason to treat it differently than any other ready-to-eat food product."

"We were probably the last to restock bagged spinach. It didn't re-appear on our shelves until January or February of 2007. We instituted a test-and-hold program to deal with microbial issues, applying good science and tight purchase specifications. We demand suppliers understand Costco's needs and they have done a terrific job working with us," he continues.

"It's a first step to get the industry focused on food safety. Testing does not provide any food safety whatsoever. All testing does is assure that a processor is providing intervention strategies to

improve the microbial quality and safety of a food item. It's insurance that the vendors are doing everything in their power to provide safe product," Wilson recently told PERISHABLEPUNDIT.COM.

The issue becomes one of which test is best to use, the amount of time available, the need for enrichment of the medium in which culture grows and the frequency of false positives, which rack the industry with financial losses, uncertainty and lost trust between buyers and sellers. But worse yet is the specter of false neg-

**"Testing does not provide any food safety whatsoever. All testing does is assure that a processor is providing intervention strategies to improve the microbial quality and safety of a food item."**

— Craig Wilson  
Costco Wholesale Corp.

atives and the possible release of contaminated product to the marketplace, Mansour Samadpour, founder and principal of IEH Laboratories & Consulting Group, Lake Forest Park, WA, pointed out in a September interview with PERISHABLEPUNDIT.COM.

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# VIEWS FROM FOODSERVICE BUYING SEGMENT

By MEREDITH AUERBACH

**A**s food dollars spent away from home continue to grow, it is helpful to understand the points of view foodservice operations, and the sources of supply from which they buy, have about the ongoing process of improving food safety.

PRODUCE BUSINESS spoke with two major players: Spartanburg, SC-based Denny's and Houston, TX-based Sysco Corporation. Both companies spoke of the signature role that fresh produce plays in their respective organizations.

For Denny's, we spoke with Mike Starnes, vice president of food safety, quality assurance and brand standards and Gene Harris, senior purchasing manager for regional procurement, which includes fresh produce. For Sysco, we spoke with Mark Mignogna, assistant vice president of quality assurance and Shane Sampels, director of quality assurance. The responses to our questions are composites of their answers.

## Describe your food-safety program for produce. How is food safety integrated into your procurement structure?

**Denny's:** A couple years ago, we made the decision to use value-added produce for all our needs except a few items such as lemons, tomatoes and mushrooms. By that we mean fresh produce that is cut, chopped, peeled or processed. We wrote tight specifications on product. Our own food-safety team, made up of individuals with college degrees in food safety, are in the production facilities without notice four times a year to do audits over and above the other third-party audits our 114 independent distributors may require. Producers receive and know our specifications and are pre-approved based on Good Agricultural and Processing Practices.

In the stores, we have a receiving process that matches deliveries with specified product from the right producer and location with the right label. There's a telephone hotline the stores can use if a delivery comes in with information that doesn't match our list.

**Sysco:** In September, we announced an enhanced food-safety program that applies to non-Sysco brand produce the same requirements we used for our own labels so we can offer customers assurance of products grown, processed and shipped under stringent food safety and traceability processes.

We now specify a third-party GAP [Good Agricultural Practices] audit and harvest crew audit for all fresh product that Sysco distributes, whether processed or field-packed.

The centerpiece of the program is an extensive online database with the ability to link grower to processor to distributor to purchaser so product passing through the Sysco system has been audited and can be traced.

Primus Labs [PrimusLabs.com, Santa Maria, CA] has developed and is implementing the database and supplier Web sites with completion due in January. At minimum, any field producing product sold through Sysco will have been audited by a third-party agency within the last year; most will have had additional audits that also become part of the record. Audits will be used to validate GAP and processing facility HACCP programs. From time to time, we also use microbial tests. Our primary approach is to validate preventive measures.

Industry food-safety finished-product testing is a work in progress. Costco has the luxury to offer or drop product. It has trained its customers not to expect every product every day. Other buying organizations face different pressures.

The task of testing implementation is progres-



Are there any circumstances under which you would step outside your preplanned program? A crop failure in a certain area or a product brought in through a broker?

**Denny's:** When a freeze sent Florida tomato prices sky high, our CEO notified us Denny's would still include tomatoes on the menu. We went out and found another source but the food-safety requirements did not change.

It was a little different with green onions. They can wick bacteria into the stalk. In that case, we pulled green onions until we could be assured they were safe. Our food-safety program is very focused.

**Sysco:** Our program is for all produce regardless of country and includes participation of our brokers and others. Often low volume to a location comes from a field of large volume. When the third-party audit is completed, it can be linked through the distribution chain for the entire volume produced. We do support small local growers by helping them build food-safety programs. In the end, the requirements are the same but we will use our resources such as our in-house food-safety staff team — 180 strong — to help them meet the standards.

## Do you require any third-party certifications from producers?

**Denny's:** We are HACCP-certified and we require membership in the California Leafy Green Marketing Order. We accept third-party agency audits in addition to our own for a layer approach. As part of our specifications we include microbial specifications and look for decreases between raw and processed product stages.

**Sysco:** We use accredited third-party agency audits for our program and the California Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement GAP as requirements. Again we do our own audits as well.

## How do you determine what level of food safety should be required of your suppliers?

**Denny's:** We've been very fortunate to date and have not experienced a produce-related food-safety problem. We stay active in the industry, working with other organizations and groups to keep our process and standards current with the latest developments in the science.

**Sysco:** We constantly monitor the science and industry information. Between the suppliers, academics, industry associations and our own extensive staff of food-safety professionals, we are able to review and develop meaningful standards. We use FDA and USDA GAP and commodity guidelines as a foundation for the program. The standards are constantly reviewed and updated as new science and reliable information becomes available.

The details differ slightly based on the needs of the supply or end user systems. Each is working to protect itself and to ensure the safety of its products and its customers.

Food-safety science experts tell us we will never be able to absolutely prevent a problem; we can only reduce it to become an almost-never-happens event. The work does pay off when incidences become a rarity. **pb**

sive, moving product to product, Wilson says. "There's infrastructure needed and it continues to develop."

York agrees in principle but is committed to strong raw-product testing with emphasis on prevention.

Both organizations are signatories to the buyer-led initiative for food safety and have committed to purchase product from companies dedicated to practicing food-safety measures. The differences of opinion may be more the result of the customer base of each company. **pb**



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# Finding Government's Place

*The produce industry and others call for increased involvement in advancing product safety.*

BY DUANE CRAIG

**A**bsolutely safe food has never been a reality. Even the U.S. government acknowledges the difficulty of guaranteeing that it's possible. But there are many areas in which government plays a role in trying to minimize danger to con-

sumers from the food they consume.

On the official federal Gateway to Government Food Safety Information Web site, a paper by the University of Minnesota Extension entitled *Food: How Safe Is Safe?*, notes: "Deciding whether a food is safe or hazardous is difficult.

It has the potential to be both. Food can never be proven to be entirely safe nor entirely hazardous. It can only be proven to be hazardous to some degree under certain conditions. While demanding completely safe food is unrealistic, it is possible to have food in which potential hazards have been reduced."

With products that have a long history of safety, a single incident causes alarm; multiple incidents spark calls for more government involvement. Testifying during a U.S. House of Representatives committee hearing, Caroline Smith-DeWaal, director of food safety at The Center for Science in the Public Interest, Washington, D.C., called for emergency regulations requiring "all fruit and vegetable producers and processors to focus on the hazards associated with their products and to have written plans in place to identify where contamination is likely to occur and how to address it." She cited mandatory regulatory compliance as the best way to make sure the supply chain addresses risks and called for FDA random inspections and more rigorous enforcement actions.

Of course, the public's growing concern and lack of confidence in the safety of the food supply ultimately shows up in the marketplace.

According to a survey by the Food Marketing Institute (FMI), Arlington, VA, 38 percent of respondents stopped purchasing some food products because of safety concerns in 2007, and 84 percent of that segment stopped purchasing some produce.

According to research published in September and reported in Food Navigator.com/USA, an online publication by Decisionnewsmedia in Hoboken, NJ, 90 percent of Americans say they are just as, or more, concerned about food safety as they were last year. Most telling is that 81 percent identify uncooked vegetables as hazardous foods along with eggs and meat. Regardless of whether anyone gets sick, the public announcement that amplifies any negative perceptions about the safety of particular foods is the recall.

## GOVERNMENT NOW AND NEXT

FDA recalls are voluntary except for baby formula. FDA gets involved when a company is not willing to do a recall or does not have the means to notify the press.

However, government as a whole has a significant impact on food safety. Governments at all levels get in on the act, notes Kathy Means,

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# FDA Becomes More Involved

BY MEREDITH AUERBACH

**N**othing occurs in isolation. It may come down to what challenges emerge from outside the industry.

In mid-September, Associated Press (AP) distributed a story to newspapers nationwide with the headline, "Safety standards not raised after *E. coli* outbreak," decrying the absence of mandatory government regulation. The story, which was based on AP's own investigation, stated that California's salad industry is under-inspected. It said data obtained through a Freedom of Information Act report showed federal officials inspect companies that grow and process salad greens an average of once every 3.9 years, compared to some Congressional proposals that would require inspections at least four times a year.

Amy Philpott, spokeswoman for United Fresh, responds that FDA is working more

closely with industry than ever "through both the California Leafy Greens initiative and the California and Florida tomato initiatives."

"The final guidance on fresh-cut processing is indeed a new step and provides specific BMP guidelines for processors to follow," she says. "The industry is continuing to work with FDA to pursue additional efforts, such as publishing commodity-specific GAPs for leafy greens."

Ultimately, consumer perception and belief is what matters. It is clear that coming together on issues such as product testing of both raw and finished product will need to occur along with improved education and communication to assure consumers the industry is committed to delivering safe product.

A single news story, given wide enough distribution, can make moot all the good intentions in the world. **pb**

PMA vice president of government relations.

"The local, state and county governments very often have strict regulations about how restaurants and grocery stores must operate in

terms of food safety — based on the model food code issued by FDA every five years or so," she explains. "There are good manufacturing practices and fresh-cut guidance and GAP [good

agricultural practices]. The FDA can withdraw product if it believes it is adulterated. The FDA can go in and inspect food facilities."

In addition, FDA can advise consumers not to eat certain products — as it did in the spinach crisis of September 2006. In effect, this type of advisory functions as a recall.

Funding research into risk factors and prevention measures is another way the federal government is involved in food safety.

USDA, which announced new funding of \$5.5 million on *E. coli* 0157:H7 research in August, also offers a Qualified Through Verification (QTV) program where Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) technical specialists help companies develop and maintain HACCP plans. Qualifying companies can use a QTV seal to promote their products.

Means says the industry at all levels works continuously on food safety. "Currently we have GAP in place and the industry has developed its own commodity-specific guidance," she says. "With some modifications, leafy greens guidance became the rules for the Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement in California. The tomato industry has come out with its own commodity-specific guidance and is building that into regulation in Florida and perhaps beyond. We have

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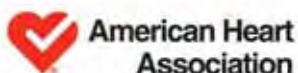
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commodity-specific guidance for melons. So a lot of people are working on food safety. It's not like there was no food safety and then spinach happened, and now everybody's working on it. Food safety didn't begin on Sept. 14 of last year. We do believe in the whole supply-chain continuum of food safety and that is happening at the company level, then at the commodity level, and then at the industry level as well.

"PMA believes we should have risk-based, mandatory federal standards," Means says, explaining this means focusing first on commodities the FDA has already identified as being the most likely to be associated with foodborne illness, such as leafy greens, melons, tomatoes, green onions and herbs. For the standards, one example relative to agricultural operations would be to make GAPs mandatory, and in some cases, commodity-specific GAPs would become mandatory.

"You just can't underestimate the importance of everyone having a robust food-safety program and of everybody within the supply chain talking to each other about it," she adds.

"The United Fresh Produce Association has called for a food-safety program that recognizes commodity specific differences based upon risk assessment," says Tom Lovelace, executive vice president, McEntire Produce, Columbia, SC, and chairman-elect for United Fresh. "We advocate

federally mandated standards that are enforced by regulators to help restore some confidence to the public that our food supply is safe."

#### INDUSTRY PERCEPTIONS

"We believe the efforts by the states so far as evidenced by the Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement, the efforts by the California and Florida tomato industry and the efforts of the almond industry are very good first steps and a part of our path to enhancing the safety of fresh produce," says Means. "But ultimately we need mandatory efforts that are risk-based. If we're going to start, let's start with the things FDA has identified as the riskiest."

Jim Gorney, PhD, executive director of the Postharvest Technology Research and Information Center at University of California Davis in Davis, CA., says the industry and government must cooperate to minimize the impact of any future food-safety crisis.

"Industry and government need to be working together, standing side-by-side if and when there is an outbreak involved with produce," he says. "The government needs to have the confidence in the industry to say, 'We know they're doing everything possible, we can't reduce the risk to zero but they're doing everything we know they should be doing.'"

Some point out that having federal standards

could not only simplify matters, but also result in some cost savings.

"Our processing operations get audited by at least 10 different auditing firms in the course of a year," notes Lovelace. "This is because we've got one customer using one group of auditors, another customer using another, and these audits cost \$3,000 to \$6,000 each plus the time and attention of our staff. But if there were a set of uniform standards being enforced that everyone could view as being adequate to protect public health, some of the auditing duplication might be eliminated."

"The average person in this business today is more concerned with how they stack up from a quality standpoint than on how much money they're making," says Tom Church, president, Church Brothers LLC, Salinas, CA. Citing Salinas farmers as industry leaders in product development and other areas, he stresses the group's competitiveness as a driving factor for quality.

"There's nothing the government could put in place that would upset us," he adds. "All it does is bring the maybe 5 percent out there that could be problems into being on the same page as everyone else, and that's probably a good thing."

"We want the FDA involved," says Carter McEntire, vice president, McEntire Produce, Columbia, SC. "We need to put some more coins in the trust bucket with the consumers." **pb**

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# Testing For Pathogens

*Best practices include micro-testing along the way to finished-product testing.*

BY DUANE CRAIG

**W**hile testing for pathogens may not be foolproof by a long shot, it is still an important component of the effort to assure the safety of food, although there may well be room for improvement as best practices continue to evolve.

"Customers want to use testing as a means of verification that all the preventative programs are actually effective," says Tom Lovelace, executive vice president, McEntire Produce, Columbia, SC, and chairman-elect of United Fresh. "In many ways, pathogen testing does not increase food safety, and I'm personally not sure that it accurately measures or verifies the effectiveness of those other [safe practices] systems."

Tom Church, president of Church Brothers LLC, in Salinas, CA, is also skeptical, likening the practice to a trip to the casino. "It's almost a game of chance as to whether you're going to find anything, even if it is there," he says. "Sometimes you can test and find a needle in a haystack that's really not going to cause a problem, and another time there might be a 5 percent contamination and you might not find it."

"If you're going to do finished-product testing, then I think it has to be very statistically validated," explains Jorge Fonseca, assistant professor and post harvest specialist for the University of Arizona in Yuma, AZ, "and if that's going to be the case, then the sample size would have to be huge. My personal opinion is that it might be more effective if we look at the processes and we try to run situations that we already know pose more risk and then we focus more on those."

Fonseca emphasizes he's not suggesting there are risks that should be ignored but rather that the emphasis should be on high-risk areas — such as a produce field that is near animals.

"Animals in a field or birds flying over a crop may be critical points, but you may not be able to control them," says Kathy Means, PMA vice president of government relations. "Agriculture has Good Agricultural Practices because you may not be able to have the same control (in an agricultural setting) that you can have in a fresh-cut processing operation where you apply a HACCP program."

Pressure from customers along with other factors caused many to begin finished-product testing when rapid tests became available. One faster test uses a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) relying on DNA to achieve results in 12 hours.

The reliability of such tests — with the rea-

sons and incidence of false negatives and false positives — are still being studied.

## HOW IT WORKS

"PCR enables you to find one organism in 100 milliliters of water," explains Jim Gorney, PhD, executive director of the Postharvest Technology Research and Information Center at University of California Davis in Davis, CA. "The difference is if you use standard plating methods, where basically you take agar plates and plate it out. It can take 24 to 48 hours before you can get a positive. The plating methods have been used for hundreds of years. Because of that, they're verified and validated and we know that if you get a positive, it is definitely a positive because with this process you also do a secondary confirmation test. With the PCR, there's no secondary confirmatory method unless you plate it out. So the rapid methods can be prone to false positives."

"The rapid test methods out there are very good and have been validated for a number of food products, but produce is usually not one of them," adds Dave Gombas, PhD and senior vice president for food safety and technology at United Fresh. "Until recently, there was very little

microbiological testing done of fresh produce so the test methods were validated for beef, seafood or other things that were high on the list needing fast, reliable results. The problem is that when you use them with produce, often there are factors within the produce, either the plants themselves or other micro organisms that are normally found on the plant, that interfere with the test results."

In an agricultural environment, the variability of potential contamination points and means of contamination pose significant detection problems. "We have very powerful methods to look for microbes," says Gorney. "But when you start talking about product, it becomes not a technique of finding the microbes but rather a sampling issue. If you're in a field of 10 million leaves of spinach, how many samples do you take? And how do you collect those samples?" He says if you could go to published statistics tables for microbiology of foods that show a sample contamination rate of 0.5 percent, it would mean one out of every 200 leaves or one out of every 200 heads is contaminated. So taking 30 samples from a field that has 10 million leaves would mean there is high probability of not finding the contamination.

## New USDA Internet Resource

**U**SDA unveiled a new Internet resource, [www.ars.usda.gov/naa/errc/mfsru/portal](http://www.ars.usda.gov/naa/errc/mfsru/portal), in September to help smaller companies answer food-safety questions and enable food processors to make science-based food production decisions.

"Scientists, food-safety risk managers, researchers and government decision-makers can use this access to predictive modeling tools and food microbiology information," says Edward B. Knipling, administrator of USDA's Agricultural Research Service (ARS). "The portal is geared toward small and very small processors, but the information it contains will benefit companies of all sizes."

The Predictive Microbiology Information Portal (PMIP) was developed by ARS scientists at Wyndmoor, PA, working with the USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS), Rutgers University, and Decisionalysis Risk Consultants, Inc., Ottawa, ON, Canada.

PMIP, which focuses on processors with 500 or fewer employees, offers information on research, regulations and resources related to Listeria monocytogenes in ready-to-eat foods, the prototype identified for the project by the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS). In the coming months, it will be expanded to include other pathogen and food combinations.

A searchable database allows users to find information that can also be used by food processors to develop plans for HACCP programs to ensure the safety of food processes.

The Web portal also includes a tutorial section with instructions on using and interpreting predictive models and links users directly to ComBase and the ARS Pathogen Modeling Program, a multi-lingual modeling tool used by food processing companies around the world. ComBase is an international relational database of predictive microbiology information that contains more than 30,000 data sets describing the growth, survival and inactivation of bacteria under diverse environments relevant to food processing operations.

pb

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"The real issue is not the speed of the test, it is the sampling protocol," adds Gombas. "Unfortunately there's not enough understanding in the industry and sometimes even among the testing laboratories as to how tests need to be designed to actually mean something."

According to Gombas, the biggest issue of finished product testing today is it could lead to a false sense of security. "A negative doesn't mean there are no pathogens; it just means that nothing is detected using the methodology."

United Fresh is currently developing an informational white paper on the considerations to use when developing microbiological testing for fresh produce.

"If you use a sample size that's too small, it's not going to have a significant correlation," says Carter McEntire, vice president, McEntire Produce. "But to take a sample size big enough for it to have a significant correlation, your lab's going to have to be the size of a football field."

### FOCUSING ON TESTING'S ROLE

"First and foremost, whenever you test finished product, you have to test and hold because if you get a positive, you've got to take action immediately," says Gorney of UC Davis. "But micro-testing is much better used for look-

ing at your potential sources of contamination. You look at the process and see where contamination can occur and then you use micro-testing in those areas to make sure that your inputs are clean, your water's clean and things are as normal as you expect them to be."

Will Daniels, vice president of quality, food safety and organic integrity at Natural Selection Foods, San Juan Bautista, CA, says the company's 2-level test-and-hold program (in raw product receiving and finished goods) validates extensive preventative measures in place upstream from each testing point. Those preventative measures come about by following GAPs, including making a site assessment, and testing soil, water, seed, fertilizer and harvesting equipment for pathogens.

"As each of us in the industry develops our food safety programs and examines the data

we're gathering," he adds, "we believe we'll be able to reach a deeper understanding of these bacteria and how they behave. To that end, we are committed to sharing what we learn from our program to further develop best practices with the industry."

"Our industry really needs to concentrate on proper practices," concludes McEntire's Lovelace. "Let's go to a risk-based process that can truly evaluate and assess the risk and then put in place proper procedures and practices that will truly mitigate those risks." **pb**



Photo courtesy of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

# Keeping Track

*For the industry to effectively trace produce, common standards are needed.*

BY BARBARA ROBISON

The ability to track and trace perishable food products from market to consumer, while complex, is a critical link in the food-safety chain.

According to industry experts, it is not a simple process to trace produce every step of the way; in fact, it is significantly more difficult than for many of today's non-perishable food products. But the industry is moving on several fronts to make traceability a reality.

According to Alan D. Newton, vice president of information services, Duda Farm Fresh Foods, Inc., Oviedo, FL, "If all produce were shipped directly to the retail market, the tracking issue would be somewhat easier." However, with wholesalers, distributors and re-packers in the middle of many transactions, associating the original supplier's identifier with the product that is re-packed or re-sorted by any entity within the supply chain becomes problematic. "These types of handling operations would

need to be able to have systems in place that would capture the supplier's identifier and associate each one with the finished product being shipped," he says.

PMA and the Canadian Produce Marketing Association (CPMA), Ottawa, ON, Canada, through a joint traceability task force, are developing recommendations for industry traceability standards, notes Gary Fleming, PMA vice president, industry technology and standards.

Common and uniformly used standards are crucial to success, he says, pointing to recent experience in Canada. "Following PMA and CPMA's creation of a best-practices document on traceability a few years ago, the consensus of those who joined the pilot program was that the system broke down when it left the initially involved company," he explains. "To be effective, when a problem occurs with a product, a determination of which shipments are involved needs to be broadcast to product recipients

within hours. If we continue to operate without a common language, using a standard product-identification number, the traceability will not be effective."

Fleming acknowledges costs are involved and the burden may not be equal. "One of the problems in a traceability system is the expense. It is recognized that various industry segments will not see a return on their investment unless everyone in the distribution chain joins the program. When the system is proprietary it is neces-



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he explains. "It also helps us address the problem without shutting down the rest of the operations."

Consumers who purchase Red Blossom berry clamshells can go online and use the ID number to look up information, notes marketing director Michelle Deleissegues. "They can also send us comments and we've already received quite a number, which are interesting and helpful," she says. "We are all learning together and we have not stressed that the product numbering system be proprietary."

In most cases, if a problem arises with a produce item, the retailer or distributor will directly contact the shipper first, according to Paul Geisterfer, ADS director of sales. "They want accurate, detailed information as quickly as possible," he explains. "Working with a shipper, our proprietary system can coordinate the two food-safety components, identifying any problems in growing and harvesting while identifying the individual package of produce involved."

The unique identification number is on each field-packed clamshell, he says. When a problem arises, the system can quickly narrow it down to the effected area, so a shipper does not have to shut down the entire operation. With modifications, the system also works with products packed in packinghouses. "The label can provide data on the product, when packed, by whom and where. In addition to clamshell packaging, we are working to develop systems for other commodities, such as wrapped lettuce."

Duda maintains records for every load of product shipped that show how many cartons are on which pallets, by pallet number, and where shipped, ensuring traceability at the pallet level.

Amy Duda Kinder, director of food safety and consumer affairs, says the company is not currently working toward using a global ID number. "In order for such a number to aid in tracking and trace back, all parties in the produce supply chain would need to capture and store the number. This capability does not exist universally in our supply chain today."

Hopefully, efforts by PMA and CPMA will soon ameliorate this problem. **pb**



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sary to coordinate with many systems to make it work — and that's especially costly."

According to a recent PMA/CPMA survey of 128 suppliers, 82 percent use their own systems, Fleming points out. "The information on each box is usually not stored in these systems and subsequently the traceability is lost. The big question to ask still is whether all the partners in the supply chain can use the system."

Global standardization of traceability systems remains a key priority of the PMA/CPMA Traceability Task Force. In a July 25, 2007, letter to PERISHABLEPUNDIT.COM, sister publication of PRODUCE BUSINESS, Jane Proctor, CPMA director of industry, technology and standardization, noted, "We are happy to report that CPMA and PMA... recently met... to begin work to establish a global traceability fresh produce implementation guideline compliant with the Global Traceability Standard, robust enough to address the main international regulations and flexible enough to be adaptable to local regulations as well as fresh produce categories."

A global implementation guide will be created to provide best practices that allow for traceability as well as to focus on establishing a standard product identification number.

One company that has taken an aggressive step in product traceability is Red Blossom Farms, Salinas, CA. Doug Turner, general manager, says the system involves a third-party audit system through Primus Labs.com, Santa Maria, CA, that is tied directly to the traceability system established with Agricultural Data Systems (ADS), Laguna Niguel, CA. The system uses a product identification number and each vendor is provided its own number, allowing buyers to look up product safety information at any time. The information includes the farm and harvest audit, water testing, weekly residue sampling and microbiological tests. The tests are done randomly so growers and plant operators do not know when they will be conducted.

Turner says a protocol is in place to handle problems that might arise. "Primus is alerted with the code number involved and we can have answers regarding the problem and shut down the affected operations within 24 hours,"

# Certifiably Safe

*Accredited and certified experts are essential to sound safety procedures.*

**BY BARBARA ROBISON**

**A**n important aspect of any fresh-produce food-safety program is the standards involved in the granting of either

accreditation or certification.

Though few U.S. buying organizations currently insist on doing business with only certified



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produce suppliers, this practice is common in Europe, especially in the United Kingdom, where retailers generally insist upon certification.

Anticipating future scenarios where U.S. retailers might require certification, many suppliers are already gearing up to be certified under existing programs.

"Commitment to food safety by the produce industry is primary, and if a program is to be done properly, it is expensive," says Devon Zagory, PhD, senior vice president, food safety and quality programs, NSF Davis Fresh, Davis, CA. A division of NSF International, Ann Arbor, MI, NSF provides food safety consulting services for the perishable food industry.

Consequently, commitment to food safety is essential says Zagory. "Be sure to know that your suppliers are equally committed. Know how they approach the food-safety issue, what practices they use, how professional the staff is and who is in charge of the food-safety program."

He believes it is crucial to have as much information as possible about all the food safety partners involved with suppliers. "Who conducts the audits and what standards are used for auditing? Are the auditors professionally trained and knowledgeable about produce versus other perishable products? Some do not understand produce microbiology. Just because they are familiar with meat, fish or dairy audits does not necessarily qualify an auditor to work with pro-



Photo courtesy of E.W. Brandt & Sons, Inc.

duce, because it can be very different. Ask questions. Visit supplier operations and see what is being done and how data is handled."

"My third recommendation," Zagory says, "is to develop your own operation's thorough understanding of food safety. Knowledge and training are your best defense against having a food-safety problem. Learn from mistakes that have been made in the past. Train your employees to know they are part of a continuous chain from grower, packer, wholesaler, distributor and retailer or foodservice operator to the consumer."

One type of certification for quality management is ISO 9000, a family of standards main-

tained by the International Organization of Standards (ISO), based in Geneva, Switzerland. It is administered by accreditation and certification bodies. Some of the requirements in 9001, one of the standards in the ISO 9000 family, include a set of procedures that cover all key processes in the business, as well as monitoring the processes to be sure they are effective.

Adequate records must be kept, output defects should be checked and corrective appropriate action should be taken when necessary. A regular review of individual processes and the entire quality system itself needs to be checked for effectiveness, working toward con-

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A company that has been independently audited and certified to be in conformance with ISO 9001 may state that it is "ISO certified." This does not guarantee the compliance or quality of the products but does certify consistent business processes are being applied.

According to Albert Quaglino, quality assurance manager, Santa Maria, CA-based Primus Labs.com, which provides pesticide and microbiological analyses and food-safety audits, Primus can provide food-safety audits that are required for ISO certification.

Quaglino says Primus uses only peer-reviewed procedures that are accepted by FDA, USDA and the Association of Official Analytical Chemists (AOAC), Gaithersburg, MD.

"We are constantly sending our analytical personnel to FDA and AOAC meetings to keep them abreast of new procedures being used. We also send them to training courses in such things as HACCP and ISO lead assessor, and we do in-house training. We are accredited to the California ELAP [Environmental Laboratory Accredited Program], affiliated with the national program regarding water, and fruit and vegetable pesticide testing. This year we also expect to be accredited to ISO 17025, for microbiological testing of the fruit itself."

"Our food-safety efforts began in 1999 when we were the first business in the United States certified under the SQF [Safe Quality Food] 2000, an international HACCP program," says Amy Eversole, quality assurance and food safety manager, E. W. Brandt & Sons, Inc., Wapato, WA. The company has since become certified by Euro Retailer Produce Working Group-Good Agricultural Practices (EurepGAP), now known as GlobalGAP, the latest internationally recognized system of checks and balances for the agricultural industry.

"At E. W. Brandt, the quality assurance department acts separately from production. This enables us to assure accurate and unbiased assessment of all products throughout our production process. We have no less than nine quality control checkpoints, beginning in the field before fruit is harvested and ending when fruit is loaded on trucks," Eversole explains.

According to Amy Duda Kinder, director of food safety and consumer affairs, Duda Farm Fresh Foods, Inc., a wholly owned subsidiary of A. Duda & Sons, Inc., Oviedo, FL, "Our primary third-party auditing contractor is Primus Labs, and AIB International [Manhattan, KS] audits our produce processing facilities. The third-party auditing system began several years ago, precipitated by major retailer recommendations."

Lou Kertesz, vice president, Fresh Quest, Inc., Pompano Beach, FL, a grower, shipper, and marketer of melons and asparagus from Honduras and Guatemala, says, "Our produce is audited by a third-party, Scientific Certifica-

tion Systems, Oakland, CA. We are HACCP, GlobalGAP and BASC [Business Alliance for Secure Commerce] certified, allowing us to market globally. The audits are done on the farms and are unscheduled so we can assure accountability to our customers."

Kertesz acknowledges the certification process is time consuming and costly, "but it is extremely important. A few years ago it was nice to have, but the information was basically filed away. Today, customers are asking to see our certification paper work," he notes. "We do a lot of food-processing business and those customers are requiring certification. We look at this as a

window of opportunity to show that our firm has a strong commitment to food safety."

Accreditation is equally important across the U.S. border in Canada. Dan Dempster, president, Canadian Produce Marketing Association (CPMA), Ottawa, ON, Canada, says CPMA dedicates considerable resources to food-safety concerns. "In their respective roles, many CPMA staff members deal with safety issues, such as accreditation, on a daily basis. This includes encouraging participation in proactive food-safety programs along the entire supply chain, addressing food-safety issues and keeping our membership informed and involved." **pb**

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# The Consumer Responsibility

*Safe handling at home is essential to keeping foods safe. Industry can help.*

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

**F**ood safety is a field-to-fork effort that requires the entire supply chain to do its part. This includes growers, packers, shippers, distributors, wholesalers, retailers and certainly consumers.

Consumers have improved their safe handling practices, according to *Unified Analysis: Research Basis for Recent Food Safety Education Outreach Efforts*, a report by Sheryl Cates of RTI International, Triangle Park, NC, at the June 2007, conference of the National Environment Health Association, Denver, CO. However, findings also indicate that "handling of fresh produce" is one of the "areas for improvement".

When it comes to consumers' role in food safety and how the industry can help, Bryan Silbermann, PMA president, says the foundation must be built upon consumer confidence.

"First and foremost," he notes, "we need to maintain consumers' confidence in the industry and confidence that the industry is doing all it can to assure a safe food supply. We can't have consumers scared away from eating fresh fruits and vegetables. Health authorities tell us that not eating these foods can be much riskier for our health than eating them with the off-chance of incurring a foodborne illness."

Scott Horsfall, CEO of the California Leafy Green Product Handler Marketing Board, administered under the California Department of Agriculture, Sacramento, CA, agrees with the importance of consumer education. "Our focus is on the fields and our mandate is on the production side to minimize risks," he explains. "However, many of our companies have active outreach programs to consumers."

Given, then, that the supply chain is doing its part to deliver safe and wholesome food to consumers, how can consumers be educated not to 'drop the ball?' Few in the industry can forget the isolated botulism outbreak involving three individuals who drank carrot juice manufactured by Wm. Bolthouse Farms, Bakersfield, CA. Ultimately, Bolthouse was cleared and the outbreak was traced to a lack of adequate refrigeration by the consumers.

But, the question remains: Who should educate the consumer about food safety?

## TAKING ON THE TASK

Several produce organizations such as the California Strawberry Commission, Watsonville, CA; Florida Tomato Committee, Maitland, FL;

New Jersey Department of Agriculture, Trenton, NJ; and the National Watermelon Promotion Board (NWPB), Orlando, FL, have taken on this task over the past year. And, of course, the federal government has a role to play.

Leslie Coleman, NWPB director of communications, says consumer food-safety education has been a priority for that organization this year. While watermelon might seem a relatively 'safe' item due to its thick, inedible skin, the fruit was the focus of an *E. coli* poisoning death of a young child who ate contaminated fruit from a steakhouse salad bar in Milwaukee, WI, in 2000. The poisoning was traced to a knife used for cutting raw meat that the cook failed to wash before cutting the melon.

In addition to clean utensils, the NWPB recommends consumers wash the melon's rind with clean water before cutting to reduce the risk of contamination. "Safe food handling information has been sent out in press kits distributed to media and to retailers," Coleman says. "Flyers geared toward consumers have been distributed at various state promotional programs such as health fairs, parades and watermelon festivals. Watermelon queens for each state and the national organization have been trained in messaging and food-safety handling tips for watermelon. They make a tremendous amount of event visits, including store openings where they cut up watermelon, pass out these flyers and provide food handling tips to consumers."

Silbermann believes that the produce industry can help consumers by promoting the four key messages of the *Fight BAC!* campaign — Clean, Separate, Cook and Chill — of the Partnership for Food Safety Education, Washington, D.C. *Fight BAC!* is a joint venture of industry associations, government agencies and health and consumer groups, formed to educate consumers about safe food handling and preparation in order to reduce the incidence of foodborne illness.

"The *Fight BAC!* campaign didn't really encompass corporations. But a new campaign we and FMI [Food Marketing Institute, Washington, D.C.] started working on last year does. It's called, Be Food Safe," Silbermann adds.

## NEW OUTREACH PROGRAM

Be Food Safe was launched Sept. 18 in Washington, D.C. as part of *Fight BAC!*'s 10th anniversary. This creative educational outreach



Consumers need to wash produce and keep it separated from raw proteins.

program was developed specifically for the retail and manufacturing communities to help build awareness and educate consumers about the four core safe food handling practices. Bold colors and modular elements in the new graphics provide complete flexibility to feature the icons and content most appropriate to individual products or store environments.

"Food retailers and manufacturers all asked for consistent messaging, not just for the produce industry," Silbermann says. "These same graphics will be used on meats, dairy foods, cleaning supplies and even take-out foods from the foodservice sector. The modular nature means manufacturers and retailers can use the core message most appropriate to a product. For example, *cook* might not be applicable to produce. But *clean* certainly is, and so is *chill*. Retailers can even use the graphics on point-of-sale signage, in flyers, ads and other materials. It will be a consistent reminder to the consumer about how to keep the food they've purchased safe until consumed."

Schnucks Markets, a 101-store chain based in St. Louis, MO, has made consumer food-safety education a priority. "We educate through our public relations and consumer affairs departments and through signage in our stores using the *Fight BAC!* program," says Mike O'Brien, vice president of produce.

pb

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## WAL-MART PRICING STUDY ROUND XV

# The Love/Hate Relationship With Wal-Mart



*In Kansas City, MO, low prices are not necessarily enough to drive consumers away from the competition and into Wal-Mart.*

BY JIM PREVOR

Wal-Mart's problem is that, much more than other chains, many people hate Wal-Mart. As we've been doing consumer focus groups on corporate social responsibility, we hear over and over again a distaste for Wal-Mart that we virtually never hear in regard to other chains.

Surprisingly, it is in only a small minority of the cases that this feeling relates to corporate issues. You get a few newshounds who can mention court cases related to Wal-Mart or have read about issues regarding Wal-Mart and health insurance for employees or unrecorded overtime or "sweatshops" overseas producing product for Wal-Mart. The vast majority of the time, however, you get people simply extrapolating from their own experience at their own Wal-Mart, and you quickly see how Wal-Mart's key problem is inconsistency of retail execution.

People's opinions about Wal-Mart often depend on where the

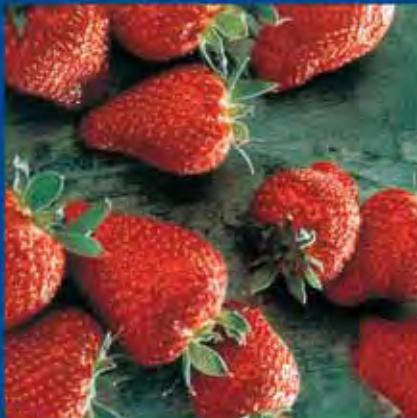
stores are located and from which demographic the stores are drawing. In recent focus group studies conducted by PRODUCE BUSINESS, consumers are of two minds about Wal-Mart. Those who live near stores in rural and outer suburban areas always seem to like Wal-Mart. The stores are reported as safe, clean and providing a decent selection even on items such as produce.

As stores approach more urban and inner-suburban areas, though, consumer attitudes change. Even consumers who report enjoying the one-stop shopping convenience start to report a fear of visiting certain Wal-Mart locations at night because they are afraid of being mugged or killed.

The urban and suburban consumers in our focus groups report that Wal-Mart mistreats its employees — not because they know anything particular about the subject but because their experience with Wal-Mart employees in these more urbanized locations is one of interacting with people who are surly, angry



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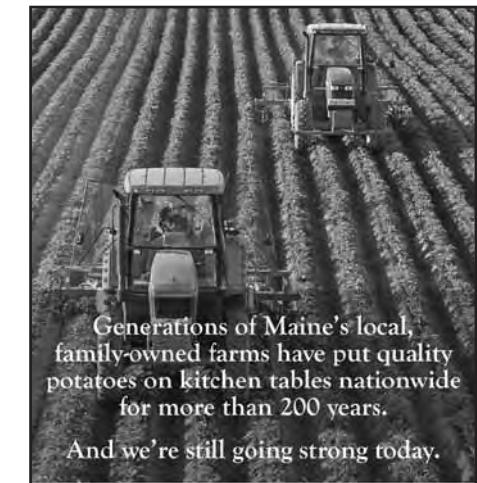
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Reader Service # 31

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Reader Service # 95

## How They Stack Up Against Wal-Mart Supercenter

Region	Store	% over Wal-Mart	Store	% over Wal-Mart	Store	% over Wal-Mart
Connecticut	Super Stop & Shop .....	.23%	Shaws .....	.34%	Big Y .....	.36%
	Harmon's .....	.2%	Smith's .....	.6%	Albertson's .....	.12%
South Florida	Super Target .....	.22%	Publix .....	.31%	Winn-Dixie .....	.52%
	Albertson's .....	.23%	Brookshires .....	.7%	Kroger .....	.19%
Dallas, Texas	Neighborhood Market ...	-1.2%	Tom Thumb .....	.27%		
	Albertson's .....	.23%				
Portland, OR	Albertson's .....	.30%	Fred Meyer .....	.22%	Haggen .....	.27%
	Safeway .....	.37%				
Phoenix, AZ	Albertson's .....	.22%	Bashas' .....	.25%	Fry's .....	.15%
	Safeway .....	.17%				
Palm Springs, CA	Albertson's .....	.19%	Jensen's .....	.60%	Ralphs .....	.16%
	Vons .....	.20%				
Detroit, MI	A&P Food Basic .....	-17%	Farmer Jack .....	.24%	Kroger .....	.28%
	Meijer .....	.3%				
St. Louis, MO	Dierbergs .....	.22%	Schnucks .....	.14%		
Houston, TX	HEB .....	.15%	Kroger .....	.30%	Fiesta Mart .....	-0.3%
Atlanta, GA	Harry's .....	.18%	Ingles .....	.16%	Kroger .....	.25%
	Publix .....	.13%	Target .....	.3%		
Denver, CO	Albertsons .....	.16%	King Sooper .....	.21%	Safeway .....	.25%
Portland, OR	Albertsons .....	.32%	Fred Meyer .....	.21%	QFC .....	.54%
	Safeway .....	.30%				
Toronto Canada	A&P .....	.35%	Brunos .....	.28%	Loblaw's .....	.13%
	Sobeys .....	.45%				
Kansas City	Dillon .....	.20%	Hen House .....	.15%	Hy-Vee .....	.18%
	Price Chopper .....	.13%				

and just don't care.

The stores are reported as dirty, with out-of-stocks frequent and, in general, places they prefer not to go.

Some go anyway. Once in a while, they go for convenience but, mostly, they go for price. It is not uncommon to hear people say things such as they hate the store so much they boycotted it for a while and then returned only because they couldn't afford not to go there.

This marks our 15th *Wal-Mart Price Report* covering 14 cities (we made two trips to Portland, OR). If you look strictly at the numbers, you wonder why Wal-Mart, big as it is, isn't bigger. In a city such as Kansas City, if you just walk into the store and buy produce, three of the big competitors — Dillon (owned by Cincinnati, OH-based Kroger), Hen House and Hy-Vee — seem to pay close attention to each other's produce pricing — and none to Wal-Mart's.

There is not even 1.5 percentage points of difference between the three, with Dillon coming in at 23.54 percent over Wal-Mart on produce pricing, Hen House at 24.72 percent over Wal-Mart on produce pricing and Hy-Vee coming in at 24.98 per-

## WAL-MART STANDS ALONE IN KANSAS CITY

This alienation from many Wal-Mart locations allows such market dynamics to exist in Kansas City.



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Reader Service # 186

**Wal-Mart Supercenter vs 4 Chains**  
**Price Comparison — Kansas City, MO**  
**Prices Available To The General Public**

Produce Item	How Sold	Wal-Mart Supercenter	Dillon	% Over Wal-Mart	Hen House	% Over Wal-Mart	Hy-Vee	% Over Wal-Mart	Price Chopper	% Over Wal-Mart
Apples - Granny Smith	Lb	\$1.38	\$1.99	44.20%	\$1.99	44.20%	\$1.79	29.71%	\$1.49	7.97%
Apples - Red Delicious	Lb	\$1.38	\$1.49	7.97%	\$1.69	22.46%	\$1.58	14.49%	\$1.49	7.97%
Asparagus	Each	\$3.23	\$4.69	45.20%	\$3.99	23.53%	\$3.89	20.43%	\$3.99	23.53%
Avocados - Hass	Each	\$1.77	\$1.49	-15.82%	\$2.00	12.99%	\$1.39	-21.47%	\$1.99	12.43%
Bananas - Yellow	Lb	\$0.52	\$0.49	-5.77%	\$0.59	13.46%	\$0.57	9.62%	\$0.59	13.46%
Beans, Green	Lb	\$1.58	\$1.69	6.96%	\$1.29	-18.35%	\$1.49	-5.70%	\$1.69	6.96%
Blueberries Clamshell	Each	\$3.38	\$3.99	18.05%	\$3.99	18.05%	\$3.99	18.05%	\$3.99	18.05%
Bok Choy	Lb	\$0.88	\$1.59	80.68%	\$0.99	12.50%	\$1.29	46.59%	\$0.79	-10.23%
Broccoli	Bunch	\$2.18	\$2.49	14.22%	\$1.99	-8.72%	\$2.89	32.57%	\$1.49	-31.65%
Broccoli Crowns	Lb	\$1.57	\$1.39	-11.46%	\$0.99	-36.94%	\$1.99	26.75%	\$1.29	-17.83%
Cabbage - Green	Lb	\$0.54	\$0.69	27.78%	\$0.59	9.26%	\$0.59	9.26%	\$0.49	-9.26%
Cabbage - Red	Lb	\$0.68	\$1.19	75.00%	\$0.99	45.59%	\$0.79	16.18%	\$0.79	16.18%
Cantaloupe - Whole	Each	\$0.98	\$3.99	307.14%	\$2.50	155.10%	\$2.00	104.08%	\$2.50	155.10%
Cauliflower	Each	\$2.48	\$2.69	8.47%	\$2.99	20.56%	\$1.88	-24.19%	\$1.99	-19.76%
Celery	Bunch	\$1.36	\$1.29	-5.15%	\$1.29	-5.15%	\$1.49	9.56%	\$0.99	-27.21%
Coleslaw - 1# Bag	Each	\$1.44	\$1.59	10.42%	\$1.69	17.36%	\$1.49	3.47%	\$1.39	-3.47%
Corn - Yellow	Each	\$0.20	\$0.40	100.00%	\$0.50	150.00%	\$0.33	65.00%	\$0.50	150.00%
Dips-Marzetti 15.5 oz	Each	\$2.98	\$3.49	17.11%	\$3.49	17.11%	\$3.39	13.76%	\$3.79	27.18%
Dressings-Marzetti 15 oz	Each	\$2.88	\$3.49	21.18%	\$3.69	28.13%	\$3.99	38.54%	\$3.79	31.60%
Eggplant	Lb	\$1.48	\$1.69	14.19%	\$1.49	0.68%	\$1.49	0.68%	\$0.99	-33.11%
Garlic	Lb	\$2.17	\$1.69	-22.12%	\$2.99	37.79%	\$2.59	19.35%	\$2.49	14.75%
Grapefruit - Red	Each	\$1.26	\$1.29	2.38%	\$1.29	2.38%	\$0.88	-30.16%	\$0.99	-21.43%
Grapes - Green Seedless	Lb	\$0.93	\$1.99	113.98%	\$1.99	113.98%	\$1.99	113.98%	\$1.99	113.98%
Grapes - Red Seedless	Lb	\$0.93	\$1.99	113.98%	\$1.99	113.98%	\$2.38	155.91%	\$1.99	113.98%
Honeydew - Whole	Each	\$3.50	\$3.49	-0.29%	\$3.00	-14.29%	\$2.99	-14.57%	\$2.99	-14.57%
Jar Fruit	Each	\$2.98	\$3.89	30.54%	\$3.99	33.89%	\$3.99	33.89%	\$3.99	33.89%
Jicama	Lb	\$1.16	\$1.69	45.69%	\$1.89	62.93%	\$1.29	11.21%	\$1.49	28.45%
Kale	Bunch	\$1.28	\$1.29	0.78%	\$0.99	-22.66%	\$1.29	0.78%	\$1.49	16.41%
Kiwi	Each	\$0.33	\$0.50	50.76%	\$0.50	51.52%	\$0.33	0.00%	\$0.33	0.00%
Lemons	Each	\$0.58	\$0.49	-15.52%	\$0.79	36.21%	\$0.79	36.21%	\$0.59	1.72%
Lettuce - Green Leaf	Each	\$1.38	\$1.00	-27.54%	\$1.29	-6.52%	\$1.89	36.96%	\$1.29	-6.52%
Lettuce - Iceberg	Each	\$1.28	\$0.92	-28.13%	\$1.39	8.59%	\$1.79	39.84%	\$1.29	0.78%
Lettuce - Red Leaf	Each	\$1.44	\$1.00	-30.56%	\$1.29	-10.42%	\$1.89	31.25%	\$1.29	-10.42%
Lettuce - Romaine	Each	\$1.48	\$1.00	-32.43%	\$1.29	-12.84%	\$1.99	34.46%	\$1.29	-12.84%
Limes	Each	\$0.36	\$0.49	36.11%	\$0.33	-8.33%	\$0.79	119.44%	\$0.50	38.89%
Mushrooms - White Bulk	Lb	\$2.54	\$3.39	33.46%	\$3.99	57.09%	\$3.99	57.09%	\$3.99	57.09%
Mushrooms - White 8 oz	Each	\$1.64	\$2.19	33.54%	\$1.89	15.24%	\$1.99	21.34%	\$1.69	3.05%
Nectarines - Regular	Lb	\$0.88	\$1.99	126.14%	\$1.99	126.14%	\$1.69	92.05%	\$1.99	126.14%
Onions - Red Bulk	Lb	\$1.16	\$1.09	-6.03%	\$1.29	11.21%	\$1.69	45.69%	\$0.99	-14.66%
Oranges - Navel Bulk	Each	\$0.68	\$0.79	16.18%	\$1.29	89.71%	\$1.88	176.47%	\$1.29	89.71%
Peaches - Yellow	Lb	\$0.88	\$1.99	126.14%	\$1.99	126.14%	\$1.99	126.14%	\$1.99	126.14%
Peppers - Bell Green	Each	\$0.78	\$0.69	-11.54%	\$0.79	1.28%	\$0.99	26.92%	\$0.69	-11.54%
Pineapple	Each	\$3.97	\$3.99	0.50%	\$4.99	25.69%	\$2.99	-24.69%	\$4.99	25.69%
Potatoes - Red Bulk	Lb	\$0.98	\$0.99	1.02%	\$0.99	1.02%	\$0.99	1.02%	\$0.99	1.02%
Potatoes - Russet Bulk	Lb	\$0.68	\$0.89	30.88%	\$0.79	16.18%	\$0.99	45.59%	\$0.69	1.47%
Potatoes - Russet 5#	Each	\$1.98	\$2.50	26.26%	\$2.99	51.01%	\$1.28	-35.35%	\$2.49	25.76%
Radishes	Bunch	\$0.98	\$1.29	31.63%	\$0.99	1.02%	\$0.89	-9.18%	\$0.99	1.02%
Salad - Caesar 7-8 oz	Each	\$2.98	\$4.29	43.96%	\$2.99	0.34%	\$2.99	0.34%	\$2.99	0.34%
Salad - Garden 1# Bag	Each	\$1.68	\$1.69	0.60%	\$2.29	36.31%	\$1.59	-5.36%	\$1.79	6.55%
Salad - Spring 5-7 oz	Each	\$2.50	\$2.99	19.60%	\$2.99	19.60%	\$2.99	19.60%	\$2.99	19.60%
Strawberries Clamshell	Each	\$1.78	\$3.99	124.16%	\$3.99	124.16%	\$3.89	118.54%	\$3.49	96.07%
Tomatoes - Cherry / Vine	12 oz	\$2.86	\$3.49	22.03%	\$3.49	22.03%	\$3.89	36.01%	\$2.99	4.55%
Tomatoes - Grape Pint	Each	\$2.58	\$2.99	15.89%	\$2.50	-3.10%	\$2.95	14.34%	\$2.99	15.89%
Tomatoes - Hothouse	Lb	\$1.98	\$1.99	0.51%	\$1.99	0.51%	\$2.88	45.45%	\$1.49	-24.75%
Tomatoes - On the Vine	Lb	\$2.18	\$2.89	32.57%	\$2.29	5.05%	\$2.99	37.16%	\$1.99	-8.72%
Tomatoes - Roma/Plum	Lb	\$1.00	\$0.99	-1.00%	\$1.69	69.00%	\$2.49	149.00%	\$1.19	19.00%
Watermelon Reg Seedless	Each	\$3.78	\$4.99	32.01%	\$5.99	58.47%	\$4.99	32.01%	\$4.99	32.01%
Yams	Lb	\$0.94	\$1.19	26.60%	\$1.00	6.38%	\$0.99	5.32%	\$0.99	5.32%
<b>Market Basket Total</b>		<b>\$95.36</b>	<b>\$117.81</b>	<b>23.54%</b>	<b>\$118.93</b>	<b>24.72%</b>	<b>\$119.18</b>	<b>24.98%</b>	<b>\$110.69</b>	<b>16.08%</b>

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**Wal-Mart Supercenter vs 4 Chains**  
**Price Comparison — Kansas City, MO**  
**Prices Available To Card Holders**

Produce Item	How Sold	Wal-Mart Supercenter	Dillon	% Over Wal-Mart	Hen House	% Over Wal-Mart	Hy-Vee	% Over Wal-Mart	Price Chopper	% Over Wal-Mart
Apples - Granny Smith	Lb	\$1.38	\$1.39	0.72%	\$1.99	44.20%	\$1.79	29.71%	\$1.49	7.97%
Apples - Red Delicious	Lb	\$1.38	\$1.39	0.72%	\$1.69	22.46%	\$1.58	14.49%	\$1.49	7.97%
Avocados - Hass	Each	\$1.77	\$1.49	-15.82%	\$2.00	12.99%	\$0.99	-44.07%	\$1.99	12.43%
Bananas - Yellow	Lb	\$0.52	\$0.49	-5.77%	\$0.39	-25.00%	\$0.57	9.62%	\$0.59	13.46%
Beans, Green	Lb	\$1.58	\$1.69	6.96%	\$0.79	-50.00%	\$1.49	-5.70%	\$1.69	6.96%
Broccoli	Bunch	\$2.18	\$2.49	14.22%	\$1.99	-8.72%	\$1.28	-41.28%	\$1.49	-31.65%
Cantaloupe - Whole	Each	\$0.98	\$2.50	155.10%	\$2.50	155.10%	\$1.67	70.41%	\$2.50	155.10%
Cauliflower	Each	\$2.48	\$2.69	8.47%	\$2.00	-19.35%	\$1.88	-24.19%	\$1.99	-19.76%
Coleslaw - 1# Bag	Each	\$1.44	\$0.79	-45.14%	\$1.69	17.36%	\$1.49	3.47%	\$1.39	-3.47%
Dips - Marzetti (15.5 oz)	Each	\$2.98	\$3.00	0.67%	\$2.50	-16.11%	\$3.39	13.76%	\$3.79	27.18%
Dressings-Marzetti (15 oz)	Each	\$2.88	\$3.49	21.18%	\$2.50	-13.19%	\$3.99	38.54%	\$3.79	31.60%
Grapes - Green Seedless	Lb	\$0.93	\$1.79	92.47%	\$1.18	26.88%	\$1.99	113.98%	\$1.99	113.98%
Grapes - Red Seedless	Lb	\$0.93	\$0.99	6.45%	\$1.18	26.88%	\$2.38	155.91%	\$1.99	113.98%
Nectarines - Regular	Lb	\$0.88	\$1.79	103.41%	\$1.49	69.32%	\$1.38	56.82%	\$1.49	69.32%
Onions - Red Bulk	Lb	\$1.16	\$1.09	-6.03%	\$0.79	-31.90%	\$1.69	45.69%	\$0.99	-14.66%
Oranges - Navel Bulk	Each	\$0.68	\$0.79	16.18%	\$1.29	89.71%	\$1.48	117.65%	\$1.29	89.71%
Peaches - Yellow	Lb	\$0.88	\$1.79	103.41%	\$1.49	69.32%	\$1.48	68.18%	\$1.99	126.14%
Peppers - Bell Green	Each	\$0.78	\$0.69	-11.54%	\$0.33	-57.69%	\$0.67	-14.10%	\$0.69	-11.54%
Pineapple	Each	\$3.97	\$3.99	0.50%	\$4.99	25.69%	\$2.99	-24.69%	\$3.99	0.50%
Salad - Caesar 7-8 oz Bag	Each	\$2.98	\$3.99	33.89%	\$2.99	0.34%	\$2.99	0.34%	\$2.99	0.34%
Salad - Spring 5-7 oz Bag	Each	\$2.50	\$2.50	0.00%	\$2.99	19.60%	\$1.50	-40.00%	\$2.99	19.60%
Strawberries 1# Clamshell	Each	\$1.78	\$3.49	96.07%	\$2.00	12.36%	\$3.89	118.54%	\$3.49	96.07%
Tomatoes - Cherry Vine	12 oz	\$2.86	\$3.49	22.03%	\$3.49	22.03%	\$2.50	-12.59%	\$2.50	-12.59%
Tomatoes - Grape Pint	Each	\$2.58	\$2.99	15.89%	\$2.50	-3.10%	\$2.50	-3.10%	\$1.99	-22.87%
Tomatoes - On the Vine	Lb	\$2.18	\$1.99	-8.72%	\$2.29	5.05%	\$2.99	37.16%	\$1.99	-8.72%
Watermelon Reg Seedless	Each	\$3.78	\$3.99	5.56%	\$5.99	58.47%	\$4.99	32.01%	\$4.99	32.01%
<b>Market Basket Total</b>		<b>\$95.36</b>	<b>\$109.54</b>	<b>19.78%</b>	<b>\$109.49</b>	<b>14.82%</b>	<b>\$111.97</b>	<b>17.42%</b>	<b>\$107.70</b>	<b>12.94%</b>

Source: U.S. Marketing Services

cent over Wal-Mart on produce pricing.

Seizing a more aggressive pricing position vis-à-vis these three chains, but still coming up far short compared to Wal-Mart, Price Chopper comes in at 16.08 percent over Wal-Mart on our produce market basket.

You can forget about these premiums having anything to do with the quality of the produce, as the price differentials are similar on pure parity products.

So whereas Wal-Mart sold a 15-ounce Marzetti salad dressing for \$2.88, the same item at Dillon was priced at \$3.49, a 21.18 percent difference. Hen House sold the same item for \$3.69, a 28.13 percent difference; Hy-Vee was \$3.99, or 38.54 percent, over Wal-Mart and Price Chopper was \$3.79, or 31.60 percent, over Wal-Mart.

## ABANDONED STRATEGY

At one point early in this series, we hypothesized that retailers unable or unwilling to compete with Wal-Mart on price would adopt a strategy by which they would price aggressively on parity products and try and make margin on unbranded produce items, which a chain could argue were of better quality.

The idea made sense. By matching

Wal-Mart's prices on parity items, chains could avoid obvious comparisons that could establish or confirm in the mind of individual consumers that Wal-Mart not only sold cheaper stuff but also was actually less expensive on quality items.

Yet such a strategy never took hold. Retailers apparently were relying on these types of items as margin-enhancers and didn't worry about consumer psychology on price as compared to Wal-Mart.

In fact, in Kansas City, even when we did a separate market basket composed solely of the items that were sold under special card-holder prices at Dillon, Hen House, Hy-Vee and Price Chopper — a market basket highly disadvantageous to Wal-Mart — Wal-Mart still comes out as the market price winner by a big margin (see table above).

Even with its loyalty card pricing, Dillon is 19.78 percent over Wal-Mart on these select produce items, Hen House is 14.82 percent over Wal-Mart on produce prices; Hy-Vee 17.42 percent over Wal-Mart on produce prices; and Price Chopper is 12.94 percent over Wal-Mart on produce prices.

In some sense, all this points to is that in many cities in which Wal-Mart has a

presence, there is no longer real price competition between Wal-Mart and the supermarkets. Those who were vulnerable because all they had to offer were low prices have already gone out of business.

Instead, the remaining supermarkets offer something — atmosphere, location, service, assortment — something that allows them to compete for the customer for whom price is not sufficient bait to draw them to Wal-Mart.

Yet there is something else all this tells us. What if Wal-Mart can get it right? What if it can improve its retail execution to the point where the large base of consumers who don't like the store suddenly became neutral about it?

Then Wal-Mart's compelling price advantage could lead to another wave of supermarket closings as weak chains find their advantages insufficient to compensate for prices that are 25 percent above Wal-Mart's.

**pb**

Editor's note: Market basket data compiled by Sonoma, CA-based U.S. Marketing Services.

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Reader Service # 200



# Convenience Packaging For Consumers

*Value-added packaging attracts harried shoppers and builds profits.*

BY TRISHA J. WOOLDRIDGE

## Produce packaging is a cyclical phenomenon.

First there was bulk. Then the pendulum swung to packages, heralded as the wave of the future. But as customers began to complain about spoilage and lesser quality, the industry switched to more bulk displays. Now the pendulum is swinging yet again.

Enhanced packaging technology and a growing demand for convenience are the impetus behind the comeback of packaged produce. Since any type of advance can result in higher price points and because there is a finite amount of shelf space, experts stress the importance of balancing the retail

desire to offer new products with space availability and customer willingness to pay premium prices.

For now, consumer response to more convenient packaging options is positive.

"Consumers are getting more used to buying packaged produce than they were about 15 years ago," explains Chip Venable, eastern regional sales manager for agricultural packaging, Reynolds Packaging Corp., Richmond, VA. "It used to be everything was in bulk, but now they want packaging so they can just take it and go."

Mona Doyle, president of Consumer Network, Inc., Philadelphia, PA, agrees. "The interest in convenience is growing. The market is there, such as cooking produce in a bag or any way to make things user-friendly."

"It's part of the active lifestyle," says Bruce Knobeloch, vice president of marketing for River Ranch Fresh Foods, LLC, Salinas, CA. "The time every consumer has is becoming more restricted."

Convenience is extremely important to consumers, according to Carol Zweep, manager of packaging services for Guelph Food Technology Centre, Guelph, ON, Canada. As they demand healthier choices in convenient packaging, she believes, "the evolving of packaging helps everything."

Microwavable steamed products are good examples of this trend, according to Lorri Koster, spokesperson for Mann Packaging Company, Inc., Salinas, CA. "Consumer response has been overwhelming. These are healthful side dishes that provide quick and easy meal solutions."

Another focus of contemporary packaging is portion control. Packaging the appropriate sizes for smaller families and individuals

Photo courtesy of NatureWorks LLC





adds value to produce offerings. Demand for single servings that can be eaten at work or even in the car is growing, notes Consumer Network's Doyle.

"The demographic is changing to smaller units," explains Kevin Stanger, vice president of sales and marketing for Wada Farms Potatoes, Idaho Falls, ID. "You've got a lot of single or retired customers or working couples. They want something easy and just enough for one or two people."

**"The demographic is changing to smaller units. You've got a lot of single or retired customers or working couples. They want something easy and just enough for one or two people."**

— Kevin Stanger  
Wada Farms

JBJ Distributors, based in Fullerton, CA, recently rolled out a line of 8-ounce packages of vegetables that can be microwaved, steamed or boiled, notes Alex Dupré, director of fresh-cut produce. The line includes squash, beans, white sweet potatoes, golden beets and a variety of seasonal items. "The 8-ounce size is a good portion for one person or it can be shared between two people," he explains. "It all comes down to improving the preparation time, especially for working couples."

Kurt Zuhlke and Associates, Inc., Bangor, PA, offers microwavable corn trays for two and three ears of corn. The company hopes

to introduce a four pack in the near future.

"It steams inside through the microwave," Zuhlke says. "And it holds in the nutritional value and flavor."

Reynolds offers an array of packaging size options, Venable says. "In the smaller sizes, they come very small, such as a half pint of produce. You can put them in convenience stores or offer them as a snack pack."

On the other hand, with the growth of club stores, larger bulk packaging of up to four pounds is being requested. "What's interesting is that this is all coming from consumer requests," Stanger adds.

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# Sustainable Convenience

**M**ore and more consumers are demanding ecologically friendly plastics and a sustainable plastics source rather than traditional petroleum-based plastics.

"Every marketer, grower, shipper and processor has an ear and eye on the green movement, so to speak,"

says Bruce Knobeloch, vice president of marketing, River Ranch Fresh Foods, LLC, Salinas, CA. "It's a balance of technology, cost, and making sure everything we do has green alternatives."

World Wide Plastics, headquartered in Springfield, MA, is making an effort to keep this balance, says Joel Kaufman. World Wide plans to reopen as a new company, called Nature's Fresh, which will specialize in organic fiber trays made from sugar cane. The film wrapping around the trays will be organic, and the trays themselves will be U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) approved as 100 percent organic.

"They are 100 percent biodegradable, compostable and organic," he explains. "The trays look every bit as nice as what people are using now — actually, they may even look nicer. We can do almost any kind of tray and it can be done in colors, as well."

Available in October, the trays and film are also oil-resistant, water-resistant and can be placed in a microwave or an oven.

Minnetonka, MN-based NatureWorks LLC, manufacturer of PLA made from 100 percent plant material, is one of the leaders in the area of ecologically-friendly packaging materials. PLA is made from fermented corn sugar. "We go from plant to plastic, using a 100 percent annually renewable resource," according to David Stanton, NatureWorks brand manager. "We have a life-cycle assessment and we want to make

a better environmental footprint."

NatureWorks interacts with its clients to show them how high-quality packaging can make a better overall product. "Now, you can talk about how good the produce is, but take it a step further and market the container as well," Stanton suggests. "You can make a commodity a point of differentiation in produce."

NatureWorks offers three different ways to market its packaging. There is the emotional component of giving back to nature and being good for the environment. The performance component demonstrates how consumers can be eco-friendly without having to give up anything; virtually no consumers can differentiate a NatureWorks package from a regular package. A statistical component, including a benefits calculator of how much greenhouse gas is prevented and how much fossil fuel is saved, is also available. "A challenge is how much info you can convey on the label," Stanton explains. "You won't be able to just look at it and know it's green. Because the plastic looks so similar, it must tell a story." **pb**

Photos courtesy of NatureWorks LLC



## SELLING QUICK COOKING

Even more important than offering a variety of sizes is offering an array of preparation options. Being able to prepare a side dish of fresh vegetables right in the package is a major draw for consumers, and the industry has answered the need by creating produce packages that can be steamed in the microwave.



Photo courtesy of Wada Farms

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"It all boils down to time," says Jeanne Clark, market manager for Pactiv Corp., City of Industry, CA. "People want to eat better, but they don't always have the time to prepare healthful meals. Fresh vegetables in microwavable packaging gives consumers the option of eating healthfully without all the preparation time."

In addition to kits that combine protein and starch products with produce items, Clark lists asparagus, artichokes and green beans as commodities selling well in microwavable bags.

For example, in early October Mann



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introduced a traditional fresh-cut vegetable line with a steam-in bag feature. "The packaging was always microwavable, but a new sealing technique provides a pressure point so the bag is a true steamer," Koster notes. "We also offer a Ready, Set, Steam line, which features fresh vegetables in a steamer tray with a sauce component. The sauce is in a separate pouch under the tray."

**"People want to eat better, but they don't always have the time to prepare healthful meals. Fresh vegetables in microwavable packaging gives consumers the option of eating healthfully without all the preparation time."**

**— Jeanne Clark,  
Pactiv Corp.**

According to Sarah Wangler, marketing manager for Sholl Group II, Inc., Eden Prairie, MN, Green Giant Fresh products include a variety of cut vegetables in microwavable bags. The brand also offers sweet potatoes cubes and fries — sweet potatoes are one of the "trendiest" vegetables in restaurants and at retail, she notes.

The Freshtable brand takes produce to a new level with SteamPerfect pouches that include tucks of "chef-inspired sauces" that melt during the 2-minute cooking time.



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IV



Photos courtesy of  
The Sholl Group II, Inc.

With a shake of the bag, the sauce coats the fruits or vegetables to create a flavorful side dish, she continues.

Likewise, potatoes are getting a package treatment. Wada Farms offers single and double potatoes packaged for oven or microwave cooking, explains Stanger.

The company will be introducing Easy Steamers, small potatoes sold in a microwavable pouch that steams them. "Historically, potatoes are something to boil or put in the oven," Stanger says. "People want something that's ready in minutes."

Outside of specific options from produce processors, packaging companies are also creating more consumer-friendly products that can be found throughout the produce department. Myra Foster, the new business development manager for the Cryovac Division of Sealed Air

Corporation, Elmwood Park, NJ, details some of Cryovac's products. Simple Steps is a line

**Outside of specific options from produce processors, packaging companies are also creating more consumer-friendly products that can be found throughout the produce department.**

composed of a rigid polypropylene tray with a breathable top of vacuum-skin packaging. The package has cool-touch handles and consumers can serve produce directly from the package. Another option is a clear tray

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**"There's a fixed footprint in the produce department. you need to make room or every new item, and you many not want to discontinue another item — so something must give."**

— Brian Gannon  
Big Y Foods Inc.

sealed with a breathable top tray that vents on its own.

Reynolds also offers convenient and cookable packaging for produce. Its product line is "dual-ovenable," meaning it can be put into either the microwave or the oven once the lid is removed. The MicroWare Supreme entrée line comes in a variety of sizes and can have two or three compartments for cross-merchandising and marrying produce in the prepared food section of the store.

## CHALLENGES OF CONVENIENCE

The increase in options and SKUs can create retail challenges, the first of which is a limited amount of shelf space for displaying new products.

Brian Gannon, director of produce and floral for Big Y Foods Inc, based in Springfield, MA, explains, "There's a fixed footprint in the produce department. You need to make room for every new item, and you many not want to discontinue another item — so something must give. For all the variety in produce, you've typically got 700-plus SKU items. Only the top 50 individual SKUs are responsible for over 50 percent of the sales every week. Produce departments must hold onto space for these items that create sales each week."

"Stores often look at profit down to the square foot or even the square inch," says Reynolds' Venable. "You need to make sure you are doing something that consumers will buy."

Price is an important part of consumer buying patterns, with most convenience-packaged items selling at premium price points. The issue retailers must struggle with

is how much will a customer pay for how much convenience.

Guelph's Zweep believes, "People will pay for convenience. After working all day, they will go to the store and buy cooked chicken and a side dish of vegetables."

However, a level of convenience is expected for the premium price point, Gannon points out. While bagged salad costs significantly more than the bulk components, many consumers consider the trade-off in time saved not having to cut up a salad worth the extra price, so bagged salads are a big seller. On the other hand, he says, broc-



Photo courtesy of Mann Packaging Co., Inc.

coli and cauliflower do not sell as well when they are processed and packaged as they do when offered in bulk.

"There's not a huge difference between

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Packaged produce must vie for a limited amount of shelf space.

broccoli florets and cauliflower florets and simply running a knife through the bulk products at home," Gannon adds. The salability of pre-packaged convenience depends on the price and the convenience. If the price is too high for the convenience offered, an item will not sell as strongly.

Storage and type of display for the more conveniently packaged and processed items are other issues for retailers, according to Big Y's Gannon. "Whenever you have something such as broccoli or cauliflower, and a knife is taken to it, it must be taken to a critical refrigeration temperature at below 41 °F," he says.

**The salability of pre-packaged convenience depends on the price and the convenience. If the price is too high for the convenience offered, an item will not sell as strongly.**

To maintain this temperature, closed fixtures are the best choice. Not all produce sections have closed refrigeration cases and, if they do, the section is generally small. Open, low-island cases, are much more common, but it is a struggle to maintain critical temperatures on open cases.

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Reader Service # 5

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Packages of value-added produce attract time-pressed consumers.

### PROMOTION TIPS

There is definitely a demand more packaged produce, and many believe just making consumers aware of products and their convenience will generate sales.

Mann's Koster says it is important to "educate store-level personnel about the technology and why it's worth the higher ring. Mann inserts a guide for store managers on our new steam products and also gives them VIP

coupons so they can take the product home and cook it with their own families."

For educating the customers, "Let vendors provide you with POP that calls out that sauce is included in the packs," she explains. "Sometimes it's hard for the consumer to identify that value add, which helps justify the higher cost. Demos are also recommended to show the cooking technique and performance of the technology."

Most industry experts agree demonstrations and taste testings can be major selling points. "The best way to feature items is through tastings," Reynolds' Venable relates. "From a packaging perspective, you can't touch, smell, etc. your grape tomatoes. Have a 'Taste Me' section, so you can get around the pick-up-and-touch mentality."

"Getting the product out to the consumer through demos and advertising is the best way to promote packaging innovations," says Zuhlke with Kurt Zuhlke and Associates, Inc. "Once a consumer gets a hold of our products, they're going to stick with them."

Highlighting these products will make a difference, Guelph's Zweep agrees. "You have to identify something as a new, convenient package. You must bring it to the attention of the consumer."

Retailers should stress that many of these consumer-friendly products are organic, adds JBJ's Dupré. "Just because our products are convenient doesn't mean they aren't wholesome and organic."

Trends show demand for more convenient packaging to suit the expanding demographic of time-pressed consumers will continue. Produce departments need to look at the growing list of options available and educate consumers about their benefits. **pb**

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Reader Service # 171

# Today's Wholesalers Have Long Reach Into Retail

*Offering more services than ever before keeps industry segment challenged and rewarded.*

BY DUANE CRAIG

**"There's no magic formula to this business," claims Matthew D'Arrigo, vice president of D'Arrigo Bros. Company of New York, Inc., located in Bronx, NY.**

"Your supermarket customers request things of you and you try to accomplish what they need and at the same time try to make a little money." He says a good wholesaler's services include drop shipping, brokering product, providing alternatives to FOB purchasing and providing good product at reasonable prices.

The list of things supermarkets are looking for

from wholesalers continues to grow. According to Mike Maxwell, president of Procacci Brothers Sales Corp., Philadelphia, PA, retailers just do not have enough time in a day so there is a lot more stress and strain on the buyers than ever before. "They seem to have to get more done with less people," he observes. "We've become problem solvers."

That rings true with Andrew Moste, sales manager for Nickey Gregory Company, LLC, Forest Park, GA. "If retailers have bad product, trucks broken down or missed loads, we're there to back them up. If we don't have the product, we can shop it on the open market and get it to them that day or the next."

Retailers depend on wholesalers to take care of quality and appreciate the long-term relationships with wholesalers that make them feel taken care of without being taken advantage of, Moste adds.

In a survey entitled *Trade Practices in the U.S. Fresh Produce Wholesale Sector*, which was conducted by Michigan State University, Lourdes Martinez and Suzanne Thornsby discovered wholesalers conducted no less than 14 different services.

Beyond traditional duties such as shipping, distribution and warehousing, wholesalers' conduct services such as sanitation, inspection, fresh-cut processing and data management, according to the study. Interestingly, the growing list of services is not causing established relationships to become more complicated. Sixty percent of respondents claimed verbal agreements are expected to remain common practice. Other practices, however, are becoming increasingly sophisticated.

"The days of produce just being dropped off at the back door are long gone," says Shane Towne, marketing and new business development coordinator for Indianapolis Fruit Company, Indianapolis, IN. "It's not just about moving product from point A to point B. The wholesaler has to be so many things to and for the retailer."

Wholesalers wear many hats, including educator, merchandiser and nutritionist, Towne continues. A growing number of wholesalers are also



Photographer: Marty Whitaire

**Terry Galway of Crosset Co. with Arlis and Marilyn Gascho of Thoman's IGA of West Liberty, OH, at the Crosset Co. Educational and Buying Food Show held Aug. 15 in Cincinnati, OH**



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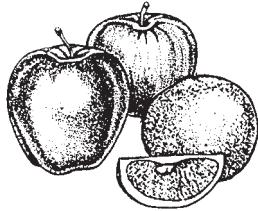


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closely responsible for and involved with the retailers' profitability.

Ron Carkoski, president and CEO of Four Seasons Produce Inc., Ephrata, PA, explains

the expanding relationship between wholesaler and retailer is about much more than merely supplying products. He remembers earlier times when wholesalers presented

## Annual Events

Wholesalers hold events and meetings at their facilities not only to highlight their services and facilities but also to offer a wide range of customer-based, value-added programs.

"We share all our results every month at our team meeting and we invite a speaker who is one of our customers to come in," says Ron Carkoski, president and CEO of Four Seasons Produce Inc., Ephrata, PA. "We encourage them to talk about things we could do better and to recognize the things we do well."

Carkoski asks speakers to talk about things they would like to see his company work on in the future. "They also talk about some of the things they see happening in the industry, and then we close it with an open question-and-answer period. The people just absolutely love it, and it's been rewarding to see that. At one of these meetings, we had one of our key retailers in here and he said that in his 30 years of business this was the first time a wholesaler had ever asked him what he thought and that the format was a unique idea."

Crosset Company, LLC, Independence, KY, recently held its annual seminar and food show at the home of the Cincinnati Reds, Great American Ballpark, for the first time in the organization's history.

The event brought together a variety of vendors, including retailers and wholesalers. Motivational speaker, Harold Lloyd, made a presentation on providing superior customer relations. Lloyd's presentation covered four key areas: associate relations assessment, customer needs assessment, critical control points, and benchmarking and monitoring.

Caito Foods Service, Inc., Indianapolis, IN, has an annual produce seminar in February, notes Bob Kirch, director of procurement and account development. "Each year it gets bigger and gets a little bit more dynamic. It's more of an educational seminar. It's about just getting our retailers more in tune with the trends and with the exciting things that

are going on out in the marketplace. We like to have it right at the end of February because it's going into spring and we get our stores energized and excited about selling produce. We do a lot of sampling and encourage our retailers to try new items and then hopefully bring them into their stores."

Indianapolis Fruit Company, Indianapolis, IN, holds two main events each year, one in July and one in February. Shane Towne, marketing and new business development coordinator, says the July event is focused on customer appreciation and new product announcements while the February event is



Photos courtesy of Indianapolis Fruit Company

more specifically geared toward a full-service educational seminar.

"It's a 2-day program that includes a trade show and highlights new products," he explains. "We also have cooking demonstrations and then the next day you're in an auditorium, taking notes and going through topics such as how to become more profitable. The summer event includes a lot of produce directors and management, and at the February one we've been getting more key employees."

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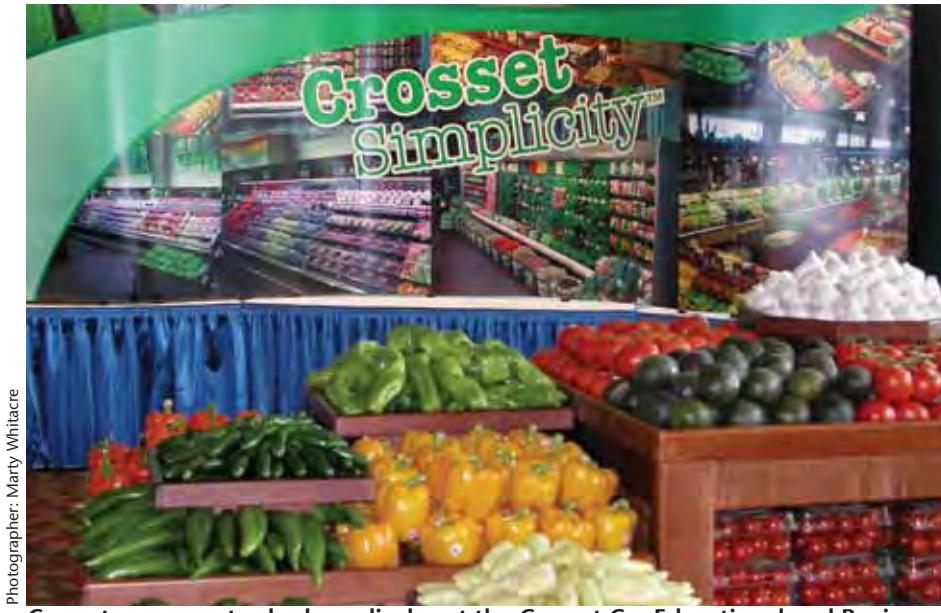
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Photographer: Marty Whittaker

**Crosset company trade show display at the Crosset Co. Educational and Buying Food Show**

their program and, if the retailer liked it, they started working together. "It's not that way anymore. It's looking at the customer, understanding what their needs are and what their customers are looking for and then supplying that. It may include supplying a part of it, or all of it or it may be supplying a very specific item, or supplying

logistical services.

"You have to have a group of people at the wholesaler who are focused on understanding the different customers and what their needs are, and then identifying and developing programs that can satisfy those needs," he says. "A program for customer A is not necessarily going to work as a pro-

**"In this industry, you can't have one model for dealing with retailers because there are so many different niches of customer demographics."**

— **Shane Towne**  
**Indianapolis Fruit Company**

gram for customer B."

Towne agrees. "In this industry, you can't have one model for dealing with retailers because there are so many different niches of customer demographics. We go in with a full team and put together a full-service program tailored to the retailer."

"A lot of our independent retailers come

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Contact: Jeff • Andy • Curt • Dan • Tom

to us as the go-to partner for a wide menu of services," says Jin Ju Wilder, president of Coast Produce, Los Angeles, CA. "The independents are usually coming to the wholesaler rather than trying to go direct because we have consistent year-round supply at volume pricing. They count on our inspection team and on our repacking services to get things into smaller units for them. But we also merchandise and provide the connection to imports, including handling the food-safety certifications necessary."

Wilder sees a growing wholesaler role in fulfilling retailers' needs related to the continued mainstreaming of ethnic foods. "As we look at the immigration trends and the growing acceptance within the general population of ethnic items, I think there will be an increasing need for wholesalers to move into category management," she says. "Oftentimes, something like a jalapeño is not available year-round from one supplier, so the wholesaler acts as a final check to provide a level of food-safety comfort across a variety of growers."

Another area Wilder sees as being ripe for wholesaler's participation is removing the headaches associated with locally grown. Coast is looking at developing a locally grown program.

Although Strube Celery and Vegetable



Photographer: Marty Whittaker

**From left: Jennifer Oskins of Frieda's (Los Alamitos, CA), Ladawn Damron of Regina, KY, Myra Mullins of Matewan, WV, and Christina Mullins, Quality Foods at the Crosset Co. Educational and Buying Food Show**

Company, Chicago, IL, is often asked to supply specialty items that require close inventory management. Tim Fleming, executive vice president, also sees the wholesaler's role as taking care of produce all the way to the fork.

"We see our responsibility in concert with

any of our customers all the way through to their customers," Fleming explains, "and that's what the industry has to understand. It doesn't stop at any one particular dock. We, as an industry, have to understand that whatever we do, we're responsible from seed to fork and that it is important for us to have



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that kind of commitment."

## CONNECTING WITH CONSUMERS

Toward that end, wholesalers work extensively with their customers' customers. "Probably 10 years ago, you wouldn't have seen a produce company in a grocery store doing a food demo, but now you do," relates Christi Beazley, produce consultant manager for Kegel's Produce, a Lancaster, PA-based wholesaler with a mix of 90 percent foodservice and 10 percent retail customers.

Kegel's also takes the produce story to

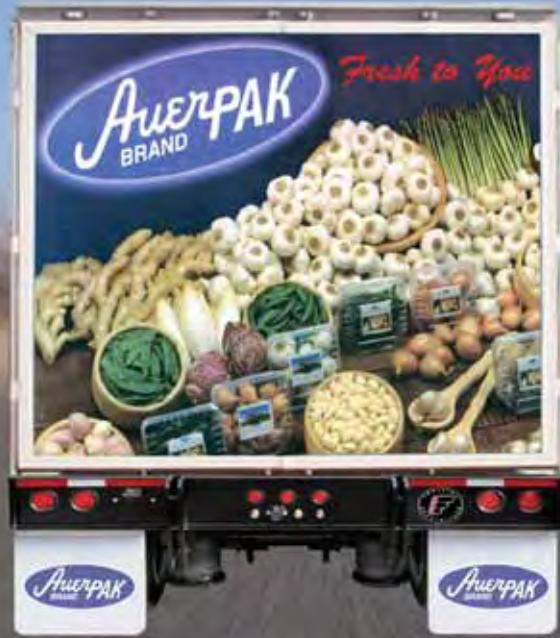
schools, universities and elderly care centers. Besides highlighting the obvious health benefits of eating fruits and vegetables, she also fills in the background by explaining where and how they are grown and ways to prepare them.

According to Wilder, Coast also brings the produce message to the consumer level, even down to day-care centers. Coast carries that message through to the store by working with *Fruits and Veggies More Matters*, the program from the Produce For Better Health Foundation (PBH), Wilmington, DE.

"We're seeing a lot more need to educate

the end-consumer and help our retailers educate that end consumer," Towne says. "In essence, the key is for people to eat more healthfully and purchase and consume more produce." Indianapolis Fruit works with the Produce Marketing Association (PMA), Newark, DE; the United Fresh Produce Association (UFPA), Washington, D.C.; and PBH to help educate consumers. The company also works heavily with various commodity commissions to provide the kind of in-store information retailers request.

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**"A lot of people get stuck in the rut of eating the same thing all the time, so we try to introduce them to different fruits and vegetables and help them make those a part of their regular diet."**

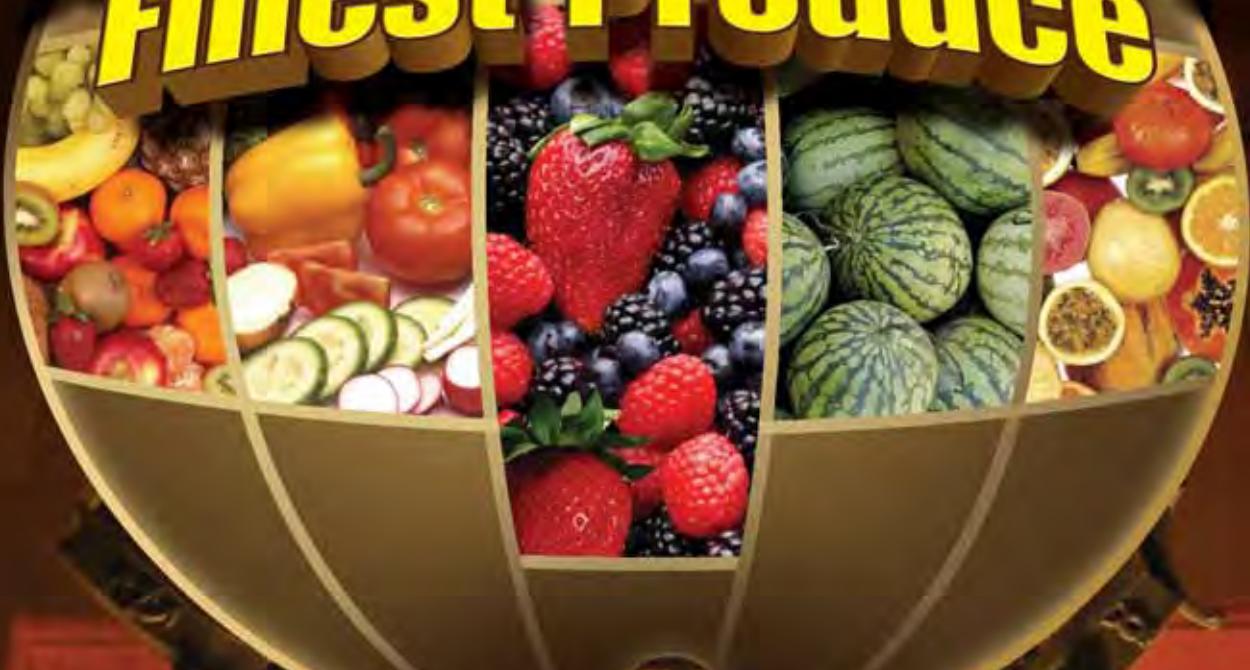
— Christi Beazley  
Kegel's Produce

"A lot of people get stuck in the rut of eating the same thing all the time," Beazley notes, "so we try to introduce them to different fruits and vegetables and help them make those a part of their regular diet." She says retailers are demanding more unusual items along with information about those items to pass on to customers.

Some of those unusual items can get a boost from wholesaler involvement at the store level. Bob Kirch, director of procurement and account development for Caito Foods Service, Inc., Indianapolis, IN, brings up his experience promoting black velvet apricots. "It was an outstanding piece of fruit and we told the story behind it, we demo'd it, we sampled it and we sold pallets of the product. We try to build that connection with the products we sell and communicate that to consumers and help them understand the benefits of produce from a health standpoint."

Kirch believes sampling encourages con-

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sumers to try new things. "We also try to get the growers more connected with the retailers to help tell that story. We stress store-level execution and constantly work with our people on category management, demonstrations and sampling."

## TRANSPORTATION TOPS LIST OF CHALLENGES

Wholesalers see their transportation roles growing. "The biggest thing about this industry right now is transportation," according to Nickey Gregory's Moste. "You can't make money if the product doesn't get

there. Over the last two years, trucks have been a very big problem from shipping point to wholesaler and from wholesaler to store. In all honesty, this industry's worst pain is transportation." He says more retailers are looking to wholesalers because they can solve the transportation problems.

"We deliver more and more produce as a percentage of our total sales year after year, probably for the last 20 years," says D'Arrigo of D'Arrigo Bros. "That seems to be a definite trend." He describes "taking over the trucking element of the industry" as part of a wholesaler's services.



Photos courtesy of Four Seasons Produce Inc.



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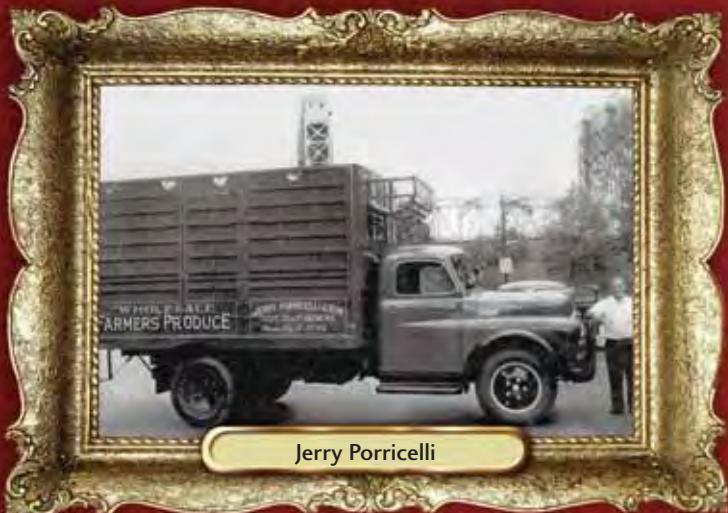
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## CATEGORY CAPTAIN ROLES EXPAND AND BLUR

While wholesalers like Procacci often serve as category captains on some items for some chains, the lines are blurring between this function and handling exclusives from certain growers or serving as cat-



Jerry Porricelli

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Reader Service # 147



Ciro & Angela Porricelli

egory managers for groups of items.

Four Seasons sells an entire line of imports through Earth Source Trading, a company that operates as a separate entity under different management. The company is also a licensed Sunkist packer, Carkoski adds.

In her region, Wilder explains, proximity of the growers to the stores means the chains often deal directly with grower/shipper. Coast serves as a category captain for small-volume groups of various categories like Asian and Hispanic items. Using store-level demographics, the company first iden-

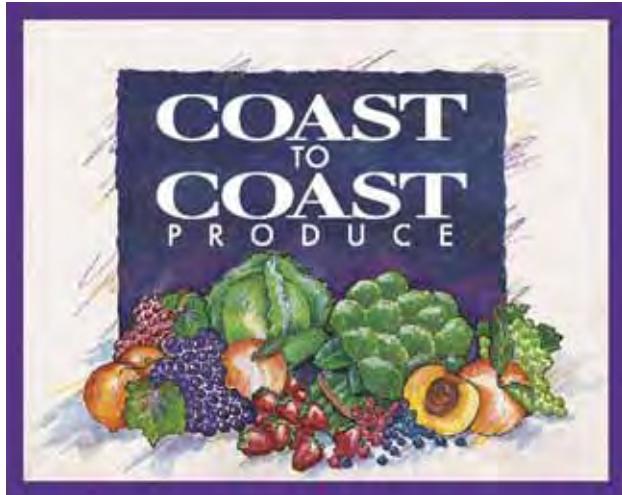
tifies stores that would be good candidates for a Hispanic or Asian program and then goes one step further and breaks down the broad population into subsets.

Wilder highlights the importance of this by pointing out the differences between Korean and Chinese preferences for greens. "Many times, when thinking about Asian produce, people immediately want to throw Chinese greens into the store. Then they fail and that retailer is gun-shy about trying ethnic items," she says. "So we uncover not only the ethnic demographic that is predominant but also the generational differences in that

population of immigrants. Then, based on all of the demographics, we make recommendations to the store about what to carry." She says those recommendations extend down even to the sizes of items to carry.

## WHOLESALE TURN MORE AND MORE TO CONSULTING

As wholesalers get deeper into the fabric of retail, the relationships begin to morph into consultancies. Maxwell says retailers look to Procacci to answer questions such as when to change varieties of a particular



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**"A wholesaler actually sees it, feels it and touches it, knows what's going on and knows how it tastes. We live the business."**

— **Mike Maxwell**  
**Procacci Brothers**  
**Sales Corp.**

item or when to change growing districts. "A lot of times, the retail buyers could have been grocery buyers just a few months ago, so they don't necessarily have the depth of knowledge a wholesaler has. A wholesaler actually sees it, feels it and touches it, knows what's going on and knows how it tastes. We live the business." And because wholesalers are directly involved with the product, he points out, they often have insights into the demand for particular items and can guide retailers in product selection and quantities.

Four Season's Carkoski agrees. "We have to look at the supply side of this industry as a relationship-building scenario as opposed to just transactional. Transactional never takes it beyond cost, never takes it beyond a particular transaction."

He believes wholesalers can drive their businesses forward by moving to a consultative position where the retailer and wholesaler trust each other and work as a team to achieve a common goal.

## IN-STORE INVOLVEMENT GROWS DEEPER

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Reader Service # 17



stores where they blend seamlessly.

"You can buy right and have a great marketing campaign, but if you don't execute it at the store level, all of that is for naught," Caito's Kirch points out. "We take ownership of making sure the whole department performs category by category. We're responsible for each category in the produce departments, responsible for growing each of the categories year after year. We make sure things are the right price at the right time. We're a full-service produce distributor and we basically manage the whole department." Caito has a staff of 35 merchandisers

who are closely involved with the stores.

"We have a proven program that offers our services to customers not only to be the supplier but also to physically run the produce departments," Four Season's Carkoski adds. "We have done this with a small family-run chain and have done it with a large-box store that wanted to outsource its produce departments. I think it's an opportunity for people who are struggling to get the right produce



Photographer: Marty Whitacre

**Bob Castellini of Castellini Group and Chris Caratan, Columbine Vineyard during the Crosset Co. Educational and Buying Food Show**



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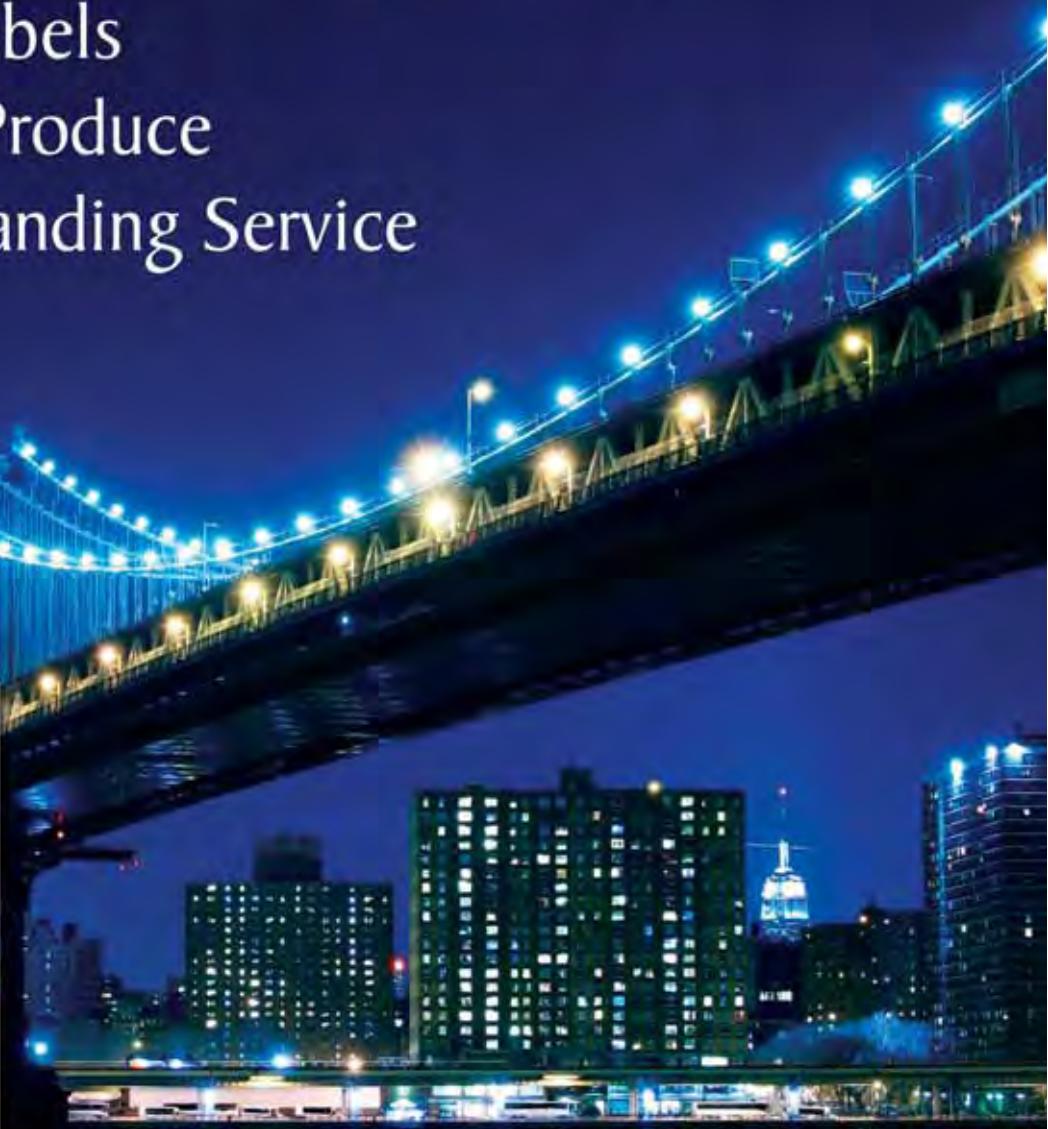
managers hired, or to get the right staffing into the stores, or who are unhappy with an existing management group."

A supplier to the U.S. Defense Department, Coast sets weekly ads, heads community outreach, conducts in-store merchandising, creates promotional displays and works with the produce managers. Beyond that, Wilder sees the greatest call for the company's merchandisers with independent retailers. "Our merchandisers give us that retail perspective," she says. "We have a team of merchandisers that we can send out in groups to help stores do an entire reset or seasonal reset. Or they go work on a regular basis with a single produce manager in a store and help identify some of the weaknesses and create an action plan to address them so that in the end we all win with increased sales."

Wilder says the merchandisers challenge Coast to think more like retail. They also assist with new item introductions by supplying the support to launch them in store

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Photographer: Marty Whitaire

From left: Edward Victurine and Sandy Wrightsman of Nemenz IGA of Lake Milton, OH, Carl Immenhausen and Lyra Vance of the Oppenheimer Group at the Crosset Co. Educational and Buying Food Show

including sampling, signage and promotional materials.

Chains still need the wholesaler to fill in gaps in supply, she believes, and Coast works with them on new item introductions and merchandising — especially in themed

promotions to supply ad pricing and lock in volume. It also trains store employees.

Wholesalers see a continuing need in the area of training and are stepping up to help fill that need. "We handle a wide array of different types of retail sets and stores, and the

**"You can buy right and have a great marketing campaign, but if you don't execute it at the store level, all of that is for naught."**

— Bob Kirch  
Caito Foods Service, Inc.

levels of experience of store employees vary," Indianapolis Fruit's Towne says. "Industry-wide, produce employees — and in some cases even the produce managers — lack experience and knowledge dealing with produce. Retailers are thirsty for someone like Indianapolis Fruit to come in and help them facilitate training. We're seeing a lot more of that as the levels of experience



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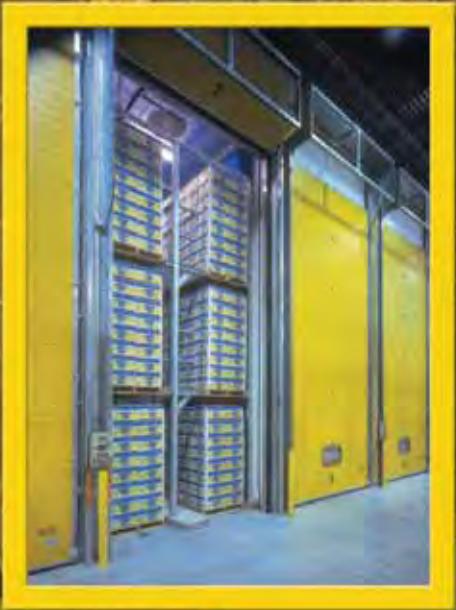
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for produce employees decline, and it's causing us to step up our training at the retail level."

## CUSTOMER SERVICE RUNS DEEPER

As the wholesale and retail segments continue to blend together, back-office and other sharing continues to evolve. For example, Four Seasons uses online order entries that give customers immediate feedback on quantities, availability and prices. It's doing a number of things to help customers analyze profitability. The company also uses an internal program that helps all areas assess their success at meeting customer needs. They, as others, find themselves increasingly filling niche needs.

"We do a lot of organic business and that's one of the niches our customers are beginning to look to us for," Carkoski explains. "We



Photographer: Marty Whittacre

**From left: Christine Sabo, Doug Sabo and Butch Adams of Sparkle Markets and Phil Romualdi of Red Zoo Marketing at the Crosset Co. Educational and Buying Food Show**

may not be their total supplier, but they recognize we're doing a great job in retail and have a great retail program called Organic Made Easy. So we're taking a look at our building to take steps to limit our environ-

mental impact. We have just radically reduced our electric and water use in the refrigeration cooling towers. Our customers are expecting us to be as efficient as possible, so we can be as competitive as possible." **pb**

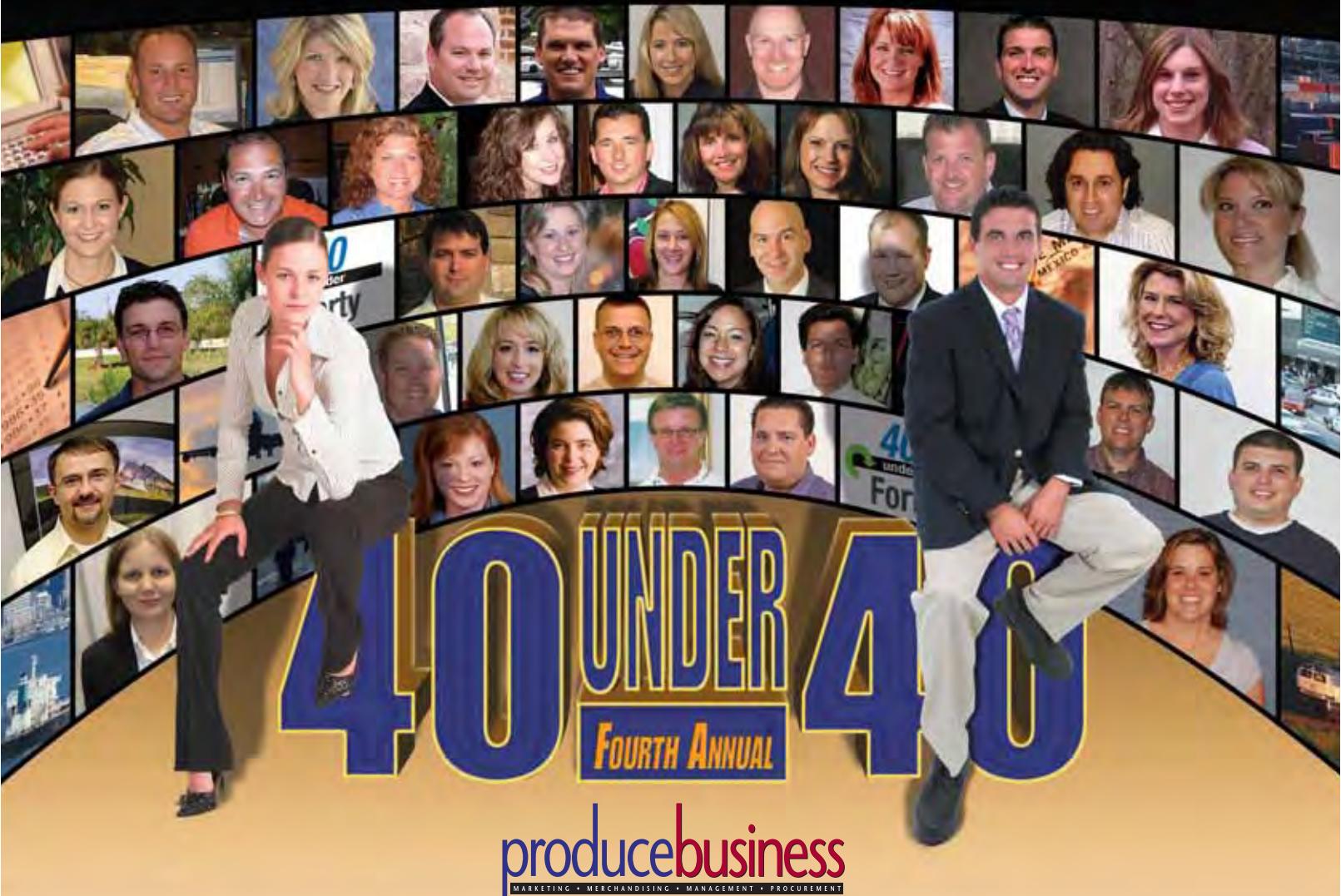
An advertisement for Tennessee produce. It features a large image of a paper grocery bag filled with various fruits and vegetables, including corn, berries, and a pineapple. The bag has the words "PICK Tennessee PRODUCTS" printed on it. In the background, there is a stylized sunburst graphic with a barn and fields. The overall theme is fresh, local produce.

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Nominee's Professional Achievements:

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## Q & A

### QUESTIONS FOR JOE PROCACCI

**J**oe Procacci, CEO, Procacci Brothers Sales Corp., Philadelphia, PA, has been a driving force in the produce industry for over 50 years. He started as a small, local wholesaler and grew his business to include repacking, importing, growing and variety development. Procacci Bros. helped develop both the grape tomato and UglyRipe tomato and by doing so, changed the way Americans think about tomatoes.

Recently Dave Diver, columnist for PRODUCE BUSINESS and former vice president with Hannaford Brothers, Scarborough, ME, sat down to talk with Joe.

**Q.** *Your father was a major influence. Can you tell us a bit about him?*

**A.** My parents emigrated from Italy in 1912 to pursue the American Dream. My father started at the bottom — he was a door-to-door produce peddler — and he did that until he retired in 1946.

When I was a young boy — younger than 10 — I began learning the fresh fruit and vegetable business by going with him, knocking on the doors of perspective customers and learning all the details about a customer's interests.

**Q.** *When did you start your own business?*

**A.** In 1946, when I was 19, my brother Mike and I bought a small produce wholesaler in Allentown [PA]. It was obvious Allentown was not going to live up to our expectations, so we started a sideline repacking tomatoes. [The package Joe holds in the picture above is one of his earliest repacking efforts.] Two years later, we moved to the Philadelphia area and used the basement in our father's house to ripen and repack tomatoes — he'd used it to ripen bananas. Pretty soon, we expanded the operation to a store near the Dock Street market where we paid the enormous rent of \$35 a month.

We didn't stay there very long, either. We moved to a market location taking one floor of a 4-story building. Within four years we took over all four floors and an adjacent building. By 1955, we had a 9,000-square-foot 1-story building that we used for the next eight years. We've been growing in Philadelphia ever since.

**Q.** *Have you had to face any setbacks?*

**A.** Up until 1961, when Castro took control, Cuba was the major source for tomatoes. After the takeover, my brother and I recognized how important supply is. In 1961, we started to develop our own farms in Florida — using former Cuban growers. In a few years we had several farms in the Naples and Immokalee areas. But by the early '80s, land in Naples became too valuable, and those farms are now golf courses and residential property.

Procacci Bros. now has multiple companies growing tomatoes in Florida, California, New Jersey and North Carolina. About 15 percent of fresh tomatoes harvested in the United States come from our farms. Growing is just part of the business plan. You do what you have to do to keep growing the business.

**Q.** *What else have you done to grow the business?*

**A.** We listened to what consumers said about tomatoes. They said most tomatoes taste like cardboard. As time went by, the emphasis on taste got louder. So we worked with researchers in Florida and with other seed developers to develop the UglyRipe and the grape tomato.

Over the past seven years, grape tomatoes have become one of the leading SKUs at retail and are popular with many foodservice and restaurant operators. Their growing importance has served as a stepping stone to increased produce volume throughout the food-service industry.

We now have seven buildings with 32 acres in Philadelphia, and our growing areas have expanded so we can deliver to most areas of the country. We have broad-line warehouses in Nogales [AZ], Plant City [FL] and Cedarville [NJ], each with its own operating and sales staff. If you buy Italian chestnuts anywhere in the United States, we probably imported them.

The opportunities for organically grown product have increased. Percentage wise, this is one of the fastest growth areas. We started the transition to organic grown table grapes five years ago in Mexico.

About 50 years ago, we started making custom pre-made fruit baskets. Large supermarket chains don't have the staff at store level to cope with the busy holiday seasons and our program is perfect for them. Selling product is one thing, but recognizing how a customer's business operates helps maximize new opportunities. Identifying alternative methods for improving a customer's results leads to a

win-win for both sides. Ultimately, this leads to the benefit of growers who sell more because consumers' needs are satisfied.

**Q.** *The UglyRipe has been a great success, but you had a lot of trouble bringing it to market. Why did you fight so hard?*

**A.** The Florida tomato growers were opposed to the UglyRipe and tried to make it conform to standards for round tomatoes — and they're not round tomatoes! We were lucky — consumers were on our side because of the UglyRipe's flavor. They were willing to pay higher prices for a tomato that tastes like a tomato.

UglyRipes are expensive compared to a regular tomato — half are lost in the field and about 20 percent are lost at the packinghouse level. Plus the packaging costs more. But the flavor makes them worth the extra cost. For the consumer, the flavor and texture represents a value. For retailers the cents profit per unit is outstanding.

**Q.** *A hallmark of a good company is the quality of its people. How do you attract and keep people?*

**A.** It's important to identify good employees and give them the opportunity to learn the business. You need to encour-

age them to take risks — people learn from their failures as well as their successes.

Mike Maxwell — he's president of the company — started on the loading dock just out of college. He took over strawberries — one of the most challenging items — and turned it into a year-round business. It didn't take long before we became the largest strawberry handler on the East Coast. Buyers counted on Mike to have product for their promotions and their shorts. They knew he understood the market dynamics of both the supply and demand sides.

At our headquarters, we have a physical fitness workout room with showers and an on-site cafeteria. In the sales room, there are TVs strategically located so the staff can be instantaneously be aware of weather changes that could affect growing and harvesting conditions, transportation and consumer demand.

On the wall are four posters — *The Art of Perfect Growing*, *The Art of Perfect Balance*, *The Art of Perfect Timing* and *The Art of Perfect Harmony*. In the middle of the copy it says, "Procacci. Perfect." These are our company objectives and they're up there for everyone to see. **pb**



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# A Retailer's Guide To West Mexican Winter Produce

*West Mexico offers ideal location and growing conditions for producing quality, year-round supplies for the United States.*

BY JACQUELINE ROSS LIEBERMAN

## **When the weather turns cold in North America, West Mexico offers U.S. consumers an abundance of fresh fruits and vegetables.**

Once considered summer produce, a lot of these commodities come through the port of Nogales on the border of Mexico and Arizona.

Tomatoes are West Mexico's top winter crop, according to the Fresh Produce Association of the Americas (FPAA), Nogales, AZ. Watermelons come in at No. 2, followed by cucumbers, squash, bell peppers and chile peppers. Honeydew melons, eggplant, green beans, avocados, cantaloupe and limes also make up a significant portion of imports.

"The biggest benefit is to be able to have consistency," says Allison Moore, FPAA communications

director. "Now stores have evolved to the point where people want to be able to buy green beans in January. You have to have tomatoes all year long. With Mexican produce, you're able to do that."

"One of the best advantages is that when it's cold in the United States, we have supplies across the board," relates Chris Ciruli, COO of Ciruli Brothers LLC, a Nogales, AZ-based group of growers, packers and distributors of fruits and vegetables, including eggplant and bell peppers. "There is a good variety of products available and a good volume coming through."

Gonzalo Avila, business manager for Malena Quality Produce Inc., Nogales, AZ, agrees. "In the wintertime, Northern Mexico has excellent growing conditions, weather-wise, that you don't have in most of the United States."

Supplies are not only abundant but also top quality. "The quality of the product is excellent," according to Stephen Yubeta, a sales representative for Farmer's Best International, a Nogales, AZ-based grower-owned company that supplies cucumbers, tomatoes, bell peppers, squash and, during the summer, grapes and mangos. "Our growing and packing practices are as technologically advanced as anywhere else in the world. We are also consistently experimenting with the latest varieties to prolong shelf life and maximize flavor."

Nick Rendon, division manager for The Giumarra Companies, a Los Angeles, CA-based year-round supplier of fruits and vegetables from around the world, including Mexico, echoes this assessment. "One of the challenges we face is poor consumer perception of Mexican produce. In fact, the produce from our ranches in Mexico is of extremely high quality. Over the last five years, the infrastructure and the growing techniques in West Mexico have greatly improved. As a result, a significant amount of product is now grown within a controlled environment. These improvements have resulted in more consistent, higher quality produce."

Avila describes the trend as a "huge revolution



Photo courtesy of Ciruli Brothers LLC



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Photo courtesy of Giumannra Companies

es in this area are made as far away as Europe and Israel.

Labor is also more readily available in Mexico than in most of the United States, which means that labor-intensive crops are easier to grow. "We are able to use indeterminate varieties, which are more labor-intensive because they require a constant picking process," Moore explains.

"Certainly we have the advantage of an abundance of labor down there," Ciruli of Ciruli Bros. adds. "Most of our stuff is hand-packed. It's not machine-packed, so there's extra attention to selection there."

## West Mexico provides off-season produce for the rest of North America.

in the last 10 years. It started with drip irrigation. There's been a huge movement to shadehouses and greenhouses. A lot of money is being put into that."

"You're dealing with a lot of good, professional growers who are trying to execute at a top level," adds Ciruli. "We've been seeing more product growing in greenhouses and we're starting earlier and ending later and growing further down south. A trend that

you're going to see is more stuff coming out of Mexico for longer periods of time."

Clearly, Mexico is positioning itself as one of the world's leaders in quality, according to FPAA's Moore. "You're seeing more greenhouses and shadehouses that control weather and pest issues," she says. "If you look at the technology used in growing in Mexico, it's coming from around the world." Many of these greenhouses and shadehouses

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**"There's been a huge, huge movement in food safety. Mexican produce is in the top tier of all of the product coming into the United States."**

— Gonzalo Avila  
Malena Quality Produce

It also means lower prices for Mexican produce. "Within the growing regions in Mexico, labor is a lot cheaper than in the United States and a lot of the rest of the world," Malena's Avila notes.

Food safety is a top priority for these growers. "There's been a huge, huge movement in food safety," he says. "Mexican produce is in the top tier of all of the product coming into the United States."

"As far as food safety is concerned, we continue to see it as an extremely important element within our process," Farmer's Best's Yubeta points out. "We continually strive to keep up with the latest ways to guarantee we are delivering clean, safe products to feed consumers across North America."

All Ciruli Brothers' warehouses in the United States and Mexico are third-party certified for food safety, notes Ciruli. "All our trucks come in with downloadable devises that monitor temperature the whole way," he adds.

Ciruli Bros. is not alone. "More and more companies are investing in systems to be able to trace back their product," Avila says.

Beyond food safety, food security is also

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**"I think Mexico is competitive in pricing with other stuff coming in from Central and South America. Our freight costs are a little higher, but we bring it in faster than if it's coming in from Central or South America by boat."**

— Chris Ciruli  
Ciruli Brothers

scrutinized to assure top quality. For example, once the produce is loaded onto trucks, "We can document on an hourly basis where that driver is," Ciruli explains.

#### THE COUNTRY NEXT DOOR

West Mexico has the advantage over other warm-climate areas because of its close proximity to the United States "Being so close to the United States, you're able to see products that are fresh, that have been on the vine longer," FPAA's Moore relates.

For some southern locales, produce can reach its destination in an amazingly short period of time. "Our proximity to the border is anywhere from four to 20 hours away, depending on the particular product and the particular growing region it is coming from," Farmer's Best's Yubeta says. "So, under normal circumstances, the product that you load was picked, packed and cooled the previous day or the day before that."

"It's about as fresh as you can get it. For the customer, it means getting a very, very fresh product," Malena's Avila notes.

In many ways, the border city of Nogales serves as a "large-scale terminal market," Moore says. "You also have the benefit here that there are so many people bringing their products across that they can mix their loads. Nogales is like a large-scale terminal market in a lot of ways."

The huge variety of products coming through the port allows companies to carry more than 20 different commodities on each truck, Yubeta explains. "The proximity of each warehouse around town is also an

## The Fresh Produce Association Of The Americas

**T**he Fresh Produce Association of the Americas (FPAA), Nogales, AZ, has promoted the consumption of Mexican produce for more than 100 years. Recently, the Association increased the amount of work it does with retailers.

"This is our fourth year of doing an expanded merchandising program," explains Allison Moore, FPAA communications director. The program includes working with individual retailers to help them decide the best time to promote specific items and make the promotions as effective as possible.

"We give them incentives to promote Mexican produce through ads or demos or however they see fit," adds Veronica Kraushaar, Viva Marketing Strategies, a Nogales, AZ-based marketing company that works with the FPAA to promote Mexican produce.

"Retailers sometimes feel that they're out there on their own, trying to promote stuff to consumers. But we're doing that, too," Moore says. "As the Fresh Produce Association, we're not only working with retailers, but we're also doing a lot to work with chefs, food writers, cookbook authors and all kinds of people who influence consumers. For example, we have our food writers' tour each year, where we bring people down [from the United States] and show them the farms."

pb

advantage as a truck is not forced to travel vast distances to different areas. Usually 15 minutes should cover the two farthest points of our mighty metropolis."

Companies within Nogales have become very efficient. "Nogales, as an importing town, has been doing this over 100 years now," Avila adds.

It is important to note, however, that the border crossing can slow down a shipment in ways that never impede U.S.-grown produce. "One of the challenges, especially in the last couple of years, is getting the product across the border in a timely manner," Avila notes.

Moore agrees, noting, "The big thing when you're looking at Nogales is that it is an international border. Fortunately, FPAA has years of experience helping companies get their produce from Mexico to the United States. We're kind of logistical experts."

"Nogales is a very competitive border compared to other borders," notes Ciruli. For example, there are expedited lanes for the trucks of regular customers to help them move through customs more quickly.

The government is working on adding a port of entry to speed things along even faster. "There's a new crossing in the works for Nogales that will be able to handle more truckloads," Avila notes. The crossing could be added in the next couple of years.

"Another issue is the volume of product crossing the border, both fresh and non-fresh," according to Giumarra's Rendon. "At times, the sheer volume of commerce can delay border crossings."

Military checkpoints for all trucks traveling through Mexico are also known to slow shipments. But that, too, is improving.

"Now, there's an agreement with the government that will expedite the produce trucks coming through there," Avila says.

Shipping by truck instead of by boat can also mean higher prices for Mexican produce. Some argue consumers are happy to pay that higher price for produce that reaches stores faster and fresher. "Certainly, I think Mexico is competitive in pricing with other stuff coming in from Central and South America," Ciruli says. "Our freight costs are a little higher, but we bring it in faster than if it's coming in from Central or South America by boat."

"The supply chain is shorter than that for Central American produce," Rendon adds.

Other challenges include one all-to-familiar for most farmers everywhere. "The biggest challenge we usually face is weather," Yubeta says. "Predicting what Mother Nature will do between December and March can be quite challenging, as you can usually count on some form of precipitation and a few cold snaps. It's just tough trying to judge when they will hit you. With that said, we sometimes are faced with abnormally warm weather, which can create quite a flush of product when you are not prepared to move through the added volume."

Fortunately, "We have a diverse supply base," FPAA's Moore explains, "so even if there are weather issues in one place, we have supply beyond that."



Photo courtesy of Ciruli Brothers LLC



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# Dressing Up Produce Sales

*Refrigerated salad dressings offer consumers options beyond salads.*

BY LISA LIEBERMAN

**American consumers demand more fresh fruits and vegetables, yet they also want convenience-oriented foods that are fast and easy to prepare.**

This growing trend has served as a big boost for the bagged salad and pre-cut vegetable segment.

One produce department category that benefits significantly from this movement is fresh, ready-made salad dressings, says Ben Gallego, specialty buyer for Central Market, a division of H. E. Butt Grocery Company headquartered in San Antonio, TX. Gallego has seen a 40 to 50 percent increase in salad dressings sold in the produce section during the past two years.

"More consumers

are demanding organics and all natural dressings without phosphates and without any kind of preservatives," he says.

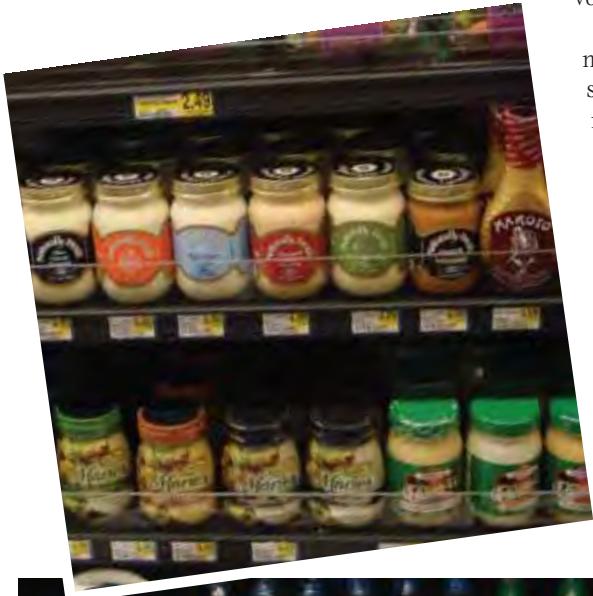
Ethnic-style dressings have become especially popular, notes Gallego, who does most of his own taste testings. "We're doing more dressings with an ethnic, more international profile these days. People get bored with the same old dressings," he explains. "And with all the access people have to the Internet and food cooking channels, people get curious about trying foods from different countries and trying things they don't normally eat."

Beyond appealing to consumers interested in trying new things, salad dressings can be great way to boost sales because they can be put on just about anything in the produce department, according to Lauri Raymond, owner of Sisters & Brothers, Inc., Austin, TX, which markets under the Sass brand of salad dressings. "People go nuts over our dressings because you can use them for lot more than just salad dressings," she explains. "One of our new concepts is that you can marinate, season all your food, stir fry with the dressings and put them on baked potatoes or pasta."

In-store demos do a lot to sell dressings along with different produce items. Raymond says one of her best demos is a recipe using Sass sesame garlic dressing and portobello mushrooms. "Whenever we do those demos, we usually end up selling at least five cases of portobello mushrooms."

Another popular recipe Raymond has created is made of chicken dipped in feta sauce, rolled in crushed pecans and served with cut-up lettuce and grapes. Since it is often impractical to serve cooked chicken strips in the produce aisle, Raymond simply pairs the dressing with fresh grapes when she does a produce department demo. "The idea is to make these demos easy for the produce managers, since they're so busy," she explains. "This is a good demo because it gives people an idea of how the grapes and dressing will taste and lets them see how different foods they never thought would go together can work in a recipe."

Most of the time, when people sample the grape or mushroom demo recipes and decide to buy a bottle of dressing, they also buy all the accompanying ingredients in the produce department to make





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the same recipe at home, Raymond says.

Central Market's Gallego agrees. "Nine out of 10 times, people will take the exact recipe and try it out at home."

**"With the advent of bagged salads, it's easier for people who want fresh-tasting salad dressings to grab a bottle in the produce section and throw it in the cart instead of making it at home."**

— Tom Cobb  
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Produce departments can capitalize on the consumer desire for convenience by offering them a wide variety of ingredients right in the department, says Tom Cobb, owner of Melbourne, FL-based Makoto Japanese Steakhouse, which packs and sells its own line of fresh dressings and sauces. "With the advent of bagged salads, it's easier for people who want fresh-tasting salad dressings to grab a bottle in the produce section and throw it in the cart instead of making it at home," Cobb says. "Everyone's in such a hurry these days. No one wants to cut things up or mix things up."

Cobb notes his salad dressings and sauces tend to go especially well with some of the new microwavable vegetables in plastic pouches being offered in the produce department. "Our Ginger Slaw Dressing is really popular," he says. "For the first time, we're also coming out with a vegetable sauce that we do in our restaurant that's good on everything from vegetables to shrimp and rice."

Cobb admits he has not conducted many demonstrations, saying he has not needed to

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Photo courtesy of Sisters & Brothers, Inc.

because the products usually sell themselves. He believes demos can be a problem because it can get expensive doing them on a regular basis.

That leaves retailers with the challenge of how to get consumers to try refrigerated salad dressings, which are usually \$1 or \$2 more than shelf-stable dressings. Central Market's Gallego tries to do regular promo-

tions on his refrigerated salad dressings to give consumers incentive to try something new.

"If something's at a lower price, people are more prone to try something new," he says, "so I try to have all the companies I work with give me four promotions a year and give me 25 percent off my cost, which I can pass on to the consumer."

**"If something's at a lower price, people are more prone to try something new, so I try to have all the companies I work with give me four promotions a year."**

— Ben Gallego  
Central Market

## New Products Expand Consumer Options

**P**aul Kusche, director of marketing, Litehouse, Sandpoint, ID, has been noticing an increased interest in vinaigrettes. In the past few years, the company has been making a huge splash with its more "pourable" dressings such as Walnut Raspberry, Balsamic, Red Wine & Olive Oil and Pomegranate Blueberry Vinaigrette. "We started focusing on the more pourable dressings in 2005, and we had a real explosion with them in 2006," he says.

Joe Costa, produce manager, PW Supermarkets, Castro Valley, CA, agrees. "I've really seen vinaigrette sales increase in the past two years. People like them because they're healthful and low in calories. They also like that they can use the vinaigrettes to baste on vegetables and meat when they're barbequing."

Consumers are gravitating to vinaigrettes because of their prevalence in fine-dining establishments, according to Carla Laylin, senior marketing manager, T. Marzetti Company, Columbus, OH. The company recently introduced several new vinaigrette fruit flavors: Light Raspberry Cabernet, Ginger Mango and Strawberry Chardonnay. Laylin says the addition of wine to the vinaigrettes has helped boost sales significantly.

"Red wine vinaigrettes have been out there forever, so we thought we'd take our vinaigrettes to the next level and make them more upscale by adding other wine flavor profiles, especially since a lot of our fruit flavors are very complementary to these wines," Laylin says. Marzetti is promoting the new fruit vinaigrettes by attaching coupons and recipe pamphlets to its bottles.

"A lot happens right at the point of purchase," Laylin says. "It's not like people go to the store with the name of a certain salad dressing on their grocery list — they just write down salad dressing. So when they get to the produce aisle and they see something new, interesting and easy to use, they're more likely to try it."

Naturally Fresh, Inc., Atlanta, GA, recently introduced fruit-inspired dressings, including Pomango, Mandarin Ginger, Apple-

Cranberry Walnut and Mixed Berry. The company's new organic line includes Greek Feta, Orange Miso, Peppercorn Ranch, Raspberry, White Balsamic, Sundried Tomato & Garlic and Aged Balsamic & Olive



Photo courtesy of T. Marzetti Company

Oil vinaigrettes. At least 95 percent of the ingredients used in the dressings are organic.

"Everyone's interested in organic produce these days," says Dave Federico, Naturally Fresh marketing manager. "Our refrigerated organic dressings are taking this interest one step further by introducing organic dressings."

But coming up with a healthful, organic product is not enough, Federico adds. "Retailers have a limited amount of shelf space, so it's really a matter of coming up with unique flavors. We didn't want to just come out with a new organic line of blue cheese or ranch. We wanted to really differentiate ourselves."

Naturally Fresh is also taking some of its low-fat dressings and marketing them as *Naturally Fresh, naturally healthy* instead of *Naturally lite*. "We could have marketed these dressings as fat-free or low in calories, but we chose not to," he notes, because low-fat dressings generally have some unattractive qualities to compensate for the absence of fat.

"Consumers don't want to think of the negative connotations of low-calorie dressings," he says. "Our dressings are all fat-free, have zero cholesterol and are low in sodium. They're all made from fruit and vegetable extracts without preservatives."

pb

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Paul Kusche, director of marketing for Litehouse, Sandpoint, ID, has also found success with using coupons and sampling. He often does joint promotions with companies such as Fresh Express. Consumers who buy a bottle of Litehouse dressing can save \$2 off a Fresh Express product, or those who buy a Fresh Express product can save \$2 off the dressings.

"We also put out recipe cards, which focus on meal solutions to help the consumers understand how to use the produce and the dressings together," Kusche adds.

Looking at the salad dressing industry, there is a lot more room for retailers to cash in on profits in the fresh, refrigerated salad dressing category, Kusche notes.

"There are \$1.4 billion dollars spent each

**"We know if we can  
just get the  
refrigerated salad  
dressings into the  
consumers' mouths,  
they'll use it for the  
rest of their lives."**

**Paul Kusche  
Litehouse**

year on the shelf-stable category and only \$200 million on the refrigerated salad dressings," Kusche says. "Our challenge is to get the consumers to not pick up the shelf-stable dressing in the grocery aisles, but to wait until they get to the produce aisle to buy their salad dressings. We know if we can just get the refrigerated salad dressings into the consumers' mouths, they'll use it for the rest of their lives."

Usually retailers devote only four feet of shelf space to refrigerated salad dressings, but it might be worth it to allocate more space to fresh salad dressings since the grocery sections of supermarkets generally do not get more than a 30 percent margin whereas items in the produce section often get 50 percent markups, Kusche said. **pb**



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Reader Service #212

# Fresh Cuts And Food Miles

Processors attempt to keep pace with green movement.

BY JACQUELINE ROSS LIEBERMAN

**A**s "localism" seems poised to be the next step in environmentally friendly supermarket shopping, the issue of "food miles" — how far food travels from farm to fork and the fuel burned to get it there — seems to come up with increasing frequency.

While many consumers love the idea in theory, few are willing to trade in the convenience of fresh-cut produce for produce in whole form that was grown nearby. Fresh-cut experts also say few consumers are willing to give up items they want if they are not in season locally.

"More and more people seem to be saying, 'I want to buy from my local farmer,'" says Jerry Welcome, executive vice president of business development for United Fresh Produce Association (UFPA), Washington, D.C., "but when push comes to shove, when you want a head of lettuce, you're going to buy it, no matter where it comes from. Consumers have gotten so used to buying fresh products all year long."

However, this does not mean those in the industry have forgotten about food miles and the overall environmental impact of shipping, cutting, packaging and distributing fresh-cut produce.

"Chiquita-Fresh Express is engaged in a great deal of work in various parts of the company as a means to inform the development of strategies and programs that help the company measure and manage its carbon footprint," says Barbara Hines, spokes-



**Will the growing consumer desire for locally grown trump the established desire for year-round choices?**

far away. In theory, it works fine when you can source locally. And companies are going to try to supplement from local sources when they can."

"As part of our efforts to offer the freshest fruits and vegetables, Del Monte does grow some of its fruit locally and sources various others from local growers," explains Dionysios Christou, vice president of marketing for Del Monte Fresh Produce, Coral Gables, FL.

"Our tomatoes are also purchased nationwide through strategic alliances with local growers that are closest to our customers," he adds. "However, most of Del Monte's products are tropical fruits that cannot be grown locally because of weather and soil conditions. Fruits like bananas and pineapples grow in the tropical climate of Central and South America."

Non-tropical items have been grown more successfully in the microclimate of California. "Seventy percent of the leafy greens in the United States comes from California," notes Eric Schwartz, president of Dole Fresh Vegetables, Inc., Monterey, CA. "A lot of vegetables are grown very well in

person, Fresh Express, Salinas, CA.

Sourcing locally is the biggest difficulty for processors outside of the Sun Belt. "Certainly processing companies have tried to do their processing closer to their markets," Welcome says. "The fact of the matter is that the raw product itself is going to be grown

## Green As A Marketing Tool

**A**ll the efforts to "go green" may eventually help sell fresh-cut produce to environmentally minded consumers. "I think it's a positive spin they're using to sell produce," says Jerry Welcome, executive vice president of business development for United Fresh Produce Association (UFPA), Washington, D.C., of locally grown and/or processed produce. "But I think it's probably more in the fresh bulk commodity produce."

According to Eric Schwartz, president, Dole Fresh Vegetables, Inc., Monterey, CA, the importance of food miles varies among consumers. "There are some consumers it's important to," he says. "Others, it's not in the top three things they look for. The average consumer still shops at a store because of price, cleanliness and quality of produce."

Over time, he says, the issue of food miles will become more important to consumers.

Buddy McEntire, president, McEntire Produce, Columbia, SC, disagrees. He believes customers want all types of produce year-round. "They expect it to be there, just like the mail."

Others argue that sourcing locally may not even be necessary. "I think our system is very efficient and very cost-effective. Otherwise we wouldn't do it," Welcome adds.

No matter which way you cut it, however, the fewer miles that produce travels, the happier everyone will be. "It can be couched under a green initiative, and it's trying to reduce the cost of business, also," Schwartz explains. "Less miles mean less freight, which means fresher product and lower costs." **pb**

other states, but leafy greens are still grown better in California and Arizona."

Buddy McEntire, president of McEntire Produce, a Columbia, SC-based company made up of produce processors, repackers and wholesalers, buys produce from local farmers when it is in season. "But that's only three or four months," he notes. "You have to go where they are."

"Being located here in Nashville, our produce comes from California, Florida and New York," relates Walter Strickland, president of Strickland Produce, Inc. The Nashville, TN-based company specializes in fresh-cut produce, including value-added product such as bagged salads and salad kits. "Nobody knows there's a season on produce anymore, because we've become so good at sourcing from around the world. The world gets smaller every day."

UFPA's Welcome agrees. "I think people are enamored with the idea of growing locally, but it just isn't possible if they want it year-round. If I want to buy a peach in December, I'm not going to get it from the United States. Sourcing is a worldwide game

nowadays." In addition, companies can sometimes obtain foreign-grown produce at better prices than domestic. "More companies are setting up production in Mexico for various reasons," he says.

Because processors have very specific requirements, sourcing locally becomes even more difficult for those in the fresh-cut industry than for those selling commodities. For instance, Strickland requires vacuum-cooled cabbage, which is not available from his local growers. "Most local produce is sold in whole format, that I see," he notes.

Local growers may not plant the varieties that processors require, either. "Athena cantaloupes are very popular here, but when you look at the sugar content and the solidi-



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ty of the melon itself, it doesn't have much shelf life when you cut it," Strickland says.

Other factors, such as weather, also come into play. "I am for locally grown produce and for the farmer," he continues, "but there's a lot of things to take into consideration. This year, we've had a drought situation in Tennessee." He suggests filling in with produce from other areas to help avoid a shortage during times like these.

## EFFICIENCY IS KEY

When sourcing locally is impossible, there are other ways to reduce the amount of fuel used in transportation, according to Welcome. "They're working on new methods of moving product in the most efficient

way possible."

Fresh Express is working to minimize its carbon footprint, Hines notes, "through industry groups, pilot research projects using new technologies and collaborating with customers and carriers to minimize dead-heading and light loads in the transportation sector."

"We've been trying to reduce our overall miles," Dole's Schwartz adds. In some cases, this means processing the food closer to where it will be sold. "We just opened another processing plant in North Carolina."

"Del Monte has several fresh-cut repacking, processing and distribution centers strategically located nationwide," Christou explains. "Each one of our fresh-cut facilities

can reach customers located within a 500-mile radius."

"The goal is to try to save your money by not shipping a lot of product that's been processed," Welcome agrees. "It's more efficient to ship bulk product cross-country. Once it's processed, there's lots of air and lots of boxes you're bringing. Processing locally helps with its freshness, too."

Some companies have begun growing more of their produce in states east of California, such as Texas, Colorado and Florida. "Each year, we move a little bit more of our growing toward the East Coast," Dole's Schwartz says.

Companies are also taking a close look at how the produce is shipped. "We consolidate as many orders as we can to a truck," McEntire says. McEntire Produce ships produce to several distribution centers, where it is combined with other products to be sent to stores. "We used to have about 20 trucks we backdoor delivered to stores with. We don't do that anymore."

Beyond concerns for the environment, companies do this to save money during this era of ever-rising fuel costs. "Just the sheer cost of transportation today forces you to consolidate those cargo loads," Strickland Produce's Strickland notes.

Newer trucks are larger than they have been in the past but use less fuel, thanks to changes such as larger tires. "One big tire replaces two," McEntire explains. This means they weigh less, allowing the trucks to be filled with more produce and increasing fuel efficiency at the same time.

The fuel itself is better for the environment now than it was earlier in the year. Diesel trucks used to use low-sulfur fuel, but about six months ago they began using ultra-low sulfur fuel. "By going to that, it reduces the emissions that get into the air," McEntire explains.

Members of the fresh-cut industry are constantly on the lookout for new ways to make shipping better for the environment. "The company is participating in working groups focused on addressing various corporate responsibility issues in transportation, one of which is carbon emissions," says Hines of Fresh Express. One of those groups is the Clean Cargo Working Group.

"The Clean Cargo Working Group is facilitated by Business for Social Responsibility [based in San Francisco, CA], a well-respected non-governmental organization and think tank," Hines continues. "The company's North American Logistics Group has recently joined the EPA program called SmartWay, as a full-participation member. SmartWay is a voluntary program aimed at decreasing greenhouse gasses and air pollution."

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# Connecting With The Organic Consumer

*Organic produce companies are applying a hands-on approach to consumer outreach.*

BY JACQUELINE ROSS LIEBERMAN

Innovative organic produce companies and organizations are going beyond old-school food ads and inserts to connect with consumers on a deeper level — in stores and outside of them.

Among the larger efforts to reach consumers, the Greenfield, MA-based Organic Trade Association (OTA) holds a month-long *Go Organic! For Earth Day* campaign each April. The promotion takes place in retail stores nationwide and showcases organic food products including produce, grocery, dairy and frozen.

"It's a real celebration that goes on for about four weeks, but it really focuses on Earth Day," explains Tonya Antle, vice president organic sales for San Juan Bautista, CA-based Earthbound Farm, one of the sponsoring companies.

"We're really excited about this program," says Scott Silverman, *Go Organic! For Earth Day* campaign manager for MusicMatters, a Minneapolis, MN-based marketing agency. "We figure it's like the *Got Milk?* of the industry," because it is the result of a partnership between not one but many brands and OTA. "We raise money from organic brands to promote organics through massive in-store promotions and a PR campaign," he explains. Spring of 2008 will mark the fourth year of the *Go Organic!* campaign.

"For free, we send retailers a *Go Organic!* kit. It's kind of a box of goodies to help them promote organics in their stores," Silverman says. These include signage and booklets



Photos courtesy of MusicMatters



filled with coupons, recipes and information about organics. "Retailers love it."

In April 2006, Silverman points out, "Participating retailers received a 43 percent higher rate of growth for the sponsor's prod-

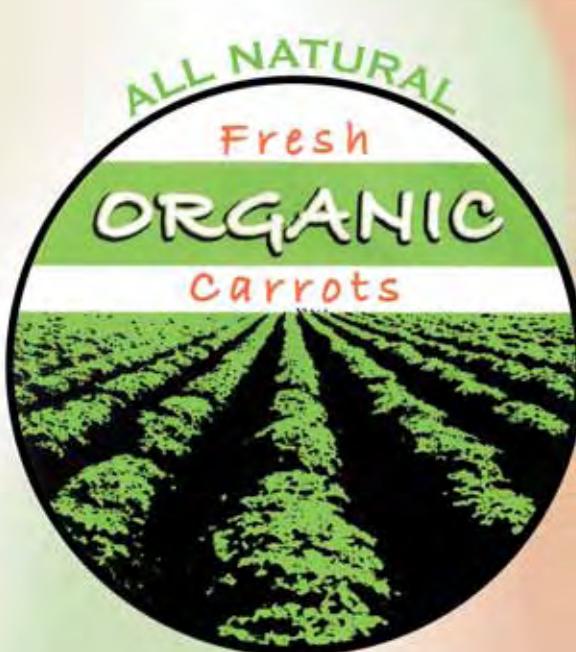
ucts compared with non-participating retailers." In the case of produce, those sponsors include Earthbound Farm and Stemilt Growers, Inc., Wenatchee, WA.

## GOODWILL AND GREENS

Some companies, such as Olivia's Organics, a Chelsea, MA-based supplier of organic greens, gain the attention of civic-minded consumers year-round through goodwill. Olivia's founded Olivia's Organics Charitable Foundation to help provide healthful food for families. Olivia's also participates in several charitable events throughout the year, such as a recent fundraiser for the Make-a-Wish Foundation, based in Phoenix, AZ. In addition to sponsoring the event, Olivia's built Boston's Largest Salad Bowl and donated \$1 to the organization for each salad sold.

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**Olivia's Organics focuses on year-round community-based goodwill efforts to promote its brand.**

also reaches out to consumers via nonprofit events, according to Rachel Veltman, director of marketing. "Right now, we are sponsoring the Rolling on the River Ride," an Illinois ride to benefit the environment. "We're

involved in three different school projects. I personally am going to be principal for a day at a Chicago public school."

By associating themselves with charitable organizations, companies make themselves known to consumers as something more than a business. "We're actually not that big on advertising," Veltman adds. "We'd rather build the relationship. It creates a ripple that will extend out. People who are involved in these types of organizations and who would show up for a benefit are a little bit more attentive. They're not just following the herd. They're probably more compassionate, which leads to an interest in how things are grown."

A longtime supplier of organic fruits and vegetables, CF Fresh, Sedro-Woolley, WA, also participates in charity events, such as marathons. "We'll donate fruit to marathon runners," says Matt Roberts, marketing sales coordinator. "This is usually well received because it give consumers who are more likely to buy our products a chance to try them."

Veltman agrees with the basic concept of reaching a predisposed audience. "Because we think organic is more healthful, we think these people will make the connection."

She also believes sponsoring charitable and not-for-profit events is consistent with

the company's mission. "The founders of our company truly believe in the benefit of organics."

## DIRECT INTERACTION WITH CONSUMERS

Regardless of where their promotions take place, organic companies agree the best way to get in consumers' good graces is to go out and meet them. Earthbound and other companies participate in the Organic & Natural Experience (ONE), a joint effort by leading natural and organic brands operated by MusicMatters. Together, the groups tour from city to city around the United States to participate in various events. "It's a marketing campaign that's designed to connect the organic brand with both mainstream and organic-minded consumers," Earthbound's Antle says.

Around the country, ONE sets up booths at food, sporting and family events, such as health fairs, 10-K runs, environmental awareness programs and the annual Taste of Chicago food festival.

At the ONE tour's stop in New York City, participants sampled Earthbound's organic produce at Grand Central Terminal. The feedback from consumers regarding these demos is positive, according to Antle. "Peo-

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**The Organic & Natural Experience (ONE) tours cities to participate in various local events.**

ple say, 'I knew you did salads, but I had no idea you had apples. What else do you have?'"

The demos often cross-merchandise the products of sponsoring brands. For example, "We'll pair up an Annie's dressing with an Earthbound lettuce," MusicMatters' Silverman says.

Goodness Greeness recently caught the attention of music fans by providing all the

organic food for Chicago's Lollapalooza festival, a 3-day event that included sets by the Yeah Yeah Yeahs, Silverchair and Pearl Jam.

"From time to time, when there's an event that touches our heart — usually a run of some sort — we'll sponsor it. Often, it's beyond donating product. We'll have a booth," says Greg Holzman, owner and president of Pacific Organic Produce, a San Francisco, CA-based maker of Purity.Organic fruit juice and functional drinks.

Demos are extremely important, Holzman notes. "We think our juice tastes good, so we try to demo our juice. We give them the juice to try, and we tell them our story."

#### MORE WAYS TO REACH OUT

Some organic companies still promote the traditional way, but with a twist. "We work on product tie-ins," says Mitch Blumenthal, president of Global Organic/Specialty Source, Inc., Sarasota, FL. For example, Global Organic did a cross-promotion with Nasoya Tofu. "If you buy a package of tofu, you get a free container of Fresh Organic Sugar Snaps.

"Overall, we feel our retail customers appreciate our efforts to think outside the box," Blumenthal says. "We also have a merchandiser who, in addition to just setting

**Around the country, ONE sets up booths at food, sporting and family events, such as health fairs, 10-K runs, environmental awareness programs and the annual Taste of Chicago food festival.**

displays, will meet with produce managers and educate them on how to educate the consumer, who is full of questions."

Frank McCarthy, vice president of marketing for Albert's Organics, Inc., based in Bridgeport, NJ, says one of the ways Albert's helps educate consumers is by offering collectable posters to retail stores. "They're not really brand specific, but decorative and informative."

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Cross-merchandising organic products helps build brand awareness.

that is to put information on the bottle."

Pacific Organic also utilizes packaging for its commodities to educate shoppers. "We try to say something about who we are on the apple bags and cherry bags," he adds.

But, while Phil Gruszka, vice president of marketing for Grimmway Farms, Bakersfield, CA, says it is important to utilize packaging to promote organics, suppliers should be careful not to cover up the product with packaging information. "One of the things we like to do is really highlight the product," he notes. "People know what carrots look like, but they want to have a lot of room to

While retailers say they love the posters, occasionally the company will receive an e-mail or letter from a consumer. "Someone will say, 'That's a gorgeous poster. I'd like to get a copy for my den,'" McCarthy says.

Albert's also tries to educate consumers through information printed on packaging. For example, "On every Grateful Harvest package, we have a little snippet that talks about organic growing and organic food," McCarthy says. "It might say something like, 'Organic produce is farmed without

**"On every Grateful Harvest package, we have a little snippet that talks about organic growing and organic food. It might say something like, 'Organic produce is farmed without using synthetic pesticides or herbicides.'"**

— Frank McCarthy  
Albert's Organics, Inc.

using synthetic pesticides or herbicides. There are about a dozen of these, and we rotate them."

Pacific Organic also uses packaging as a means to reach consumers. "The reality is we work for the grower and we work for the fruit," Holzman says. "We felt we could reach out to the consumer and say, 'If you support us, buy our juice! The best way we can do

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look at it, flip it over and see it's a quality product."

Rich Enger, organic sales manager for Pacific International Marketing, Salinas, CA, describes using packaging to market organic

**"You have to figure out a way to do the most with the least. Fancy packaging may turn off the real organic people."**

— Rich Enger  
Pacific International  
Marketing

foods as a bit of a Catch-22 because target consumers are more likely to buy products packaged in no-frills, ecologically friendly packaging. "You have to figure out a way to do the most with the least. Fancy packaging may turn off the real organic people."

Regardless of how much information suppliers choose to put on the packaging, Rob Gurney, sales representative for JBJ Distributing, Fullerton, CA, says it is critical that all organic products have "Organic" clearly printed on the packaging.

"All too often the company's name or location is the most dominant message, but it shouldn't necessarily be," he says. "If we all focused more on identifying the product as organic first, it would be a big help to retailers and consumers."

Enger agrees. "Labeling products as organic is very important. It ensures products at the checkout are correctly identified as organic."

All too often, he explains, cashiers are ringing up organic produce at the same price as conventional produce. "This is a big problem because it shows retailers they aren't making any money with organics." This not only hurts the retailers but also the whole industry. Consumers also lose out, Pacific International's Enger says, because



Photo courtesy of Acme Markets

Prominent signage touting organic draws in consumers.

retail managers may opt to stop carrying particular organic products if they do not think they are producing profits. "If the store doesn't see a return on their investment, they aren't going to get behind it," he adds.

Beyond creative packaging, Earthbound printed a brochure/mailер to give consumers information about organic produce, Antle says. The company plans to work

with retailers to send these out as custom mailings, or retailers can place them at key locations throughout the store.

In the end, it takes more than one type of promotion to impress the wide range of organic consumers. "There is no hard-and-fast rule about who the organic consumer is. People choose organics for a number of reasons, from health to flavor," Antle says. "It's important to say this is food for everyone,

so how do we attract them?"

To attract health-conscious consumers, Earthbound recently held the *Make 2007 Your Healthiest Year Ever Sweepstakes*, in which one winner received a personal training session with celebrity fitness guru Denise Austin. "We see promotions as a great way to reward the existing consumer, as well as a great way to bring new people to the category," Antle continues.

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Reader Service # 195

# Consumers Are Discovering For Themselves

In addition to the information they find printed on packages, on signs and in handouts, many consumers learn about organic produce on their own through traditional media and the Internet.

"It's because of the nature of the organic consumer," observes Frank McCarthy, vice president of marketing, Albert's Organics, Inc., based in Bridgeport, NJ. "Psychologically, they are interested in discovery. They get a feeling of accomplishment by learning something new."

This is why Albert's is working to get organics into magazine articles. But, McCarthy says, "The major thrust is going to be to expand our Web presence, with more links, more articles on, for instance, health benefits of certain products."

Pacific Organic Produce, San Francisco, CA, prints its Web site address on packages of produce and on bottles Purity.Organic juice and drinks. "The organic consumer is very computer literate, or at least computer accessible, and there's only so much you can fit on a bottle," explains Greg Holzman, owner and president.

Earthbound Farm, San Juan Bautista, CA, operates a Web site that offers helpful references for consumers, such as a salad greens identification chart and a myriad of recipes. The company also recently published a cookbook called *Food to Live By*, written by founder Myra Goodman and published by Workman Publishing.

The book not only promotes organics and the Earthbound Farm brand, but it also has "positioned Myra as an organic authority," says Tonya Antle, vice president of organic sales. Goodman now appears regularly on talk shows and in print media as an expert on organic produce.

CF Fresh, a Sedro-Woolley, WA-based supplier of certified organic fruits and vegetables, also uses a Web site to educate consumers and retailers about organic foods, including information about organic agriculture, the benefits of consuming organic foods and where organic products can be purchased. "We walk consumers through it all," says marketing sales coordinator Matt Roberts. "We also include grower profiles that help place a face to the name."

Likewise, Grimmway Farms, Inc., Bakersfield, CA, posts information about the certification process involved in producing organics, says Phil Gruszka, vice president of marketing. "There's also point-of-sale information for retailers," he adds.

Goodness Greeness, Inc., Chicago, IL, sends an e-newsletter directly to more than 2,000 consumers. Rachel Veltman, director of marketing, believes getting the information to consumers is key to increasing sales. "Organic consumers are a bit more information driven," she explains. "They are going to be more concerned about where their food is grown."

pb

For MusicMatters, "Our sweet spot is going after mainstream consumers who may be dabbling in organic," Silverman says. "The greatest opportunity for growth is to

get them committed." He notes many organic consumers start by buying organic produce then move on to other parts of the store. "Forty percent of all organic food sales

are in fruits and vegetables."

While the growth in value-added conventional produce is flat, Antle notes, sales of value-added organics continue to grow



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Photo courtesy of OEarthbound Farm

Fitness guru Denise Austin (left) with Earthbound Farm's *Make 2007 Your Healthiest Year Ever* sweepstakes winner Mary Swisher of Cary, IL (right), and her daughter Lindsay (center).

tremendously.

For some companies, such as Goodness Greeness, branded produce is only a small part of sales. "We're trying to build a brand, but it's still a very small amount of our business, overall," Veltman says. So in addition to increasing brand awareness, the company is working to increase overall demand for

organics.

Antle agrees promotions for organic produce help every brand. "Earthbound Farm is a brand they know and trust and really choose more often, but if other brands help create awareness of organics, too, the whole boat rises."

Overall, she says, "There's a lot more

**"There is no hard-and-fast rule about who the organic consumer is. People choose organics for a number of reasons, from health to flavor. It's important to say this is food for everyone, so how do we attract them?"**

— Tonya Antle  
Earthbound Farm

room for growth and opportunity, and promotions are just one way we're going to get there. The future for organic produce looks really bright." **pb**

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# A Fresh Look At Peruvian Asparagus

*Five top five ways to increase sales.*

BY LYNN GALANIS

**Peruvian asparagus' contribution to year-round availability, elegant appearance and ease of preparation make it an appealing vegetable for consumers seeking a healthful fresh vegetable to serve their families.**

Priscilla Lleras, coordinator for the Peruvian Asparagus Importer's Association (PAIA), Keller, TX, says the United States received more than 69,000 metric tons of asparagus from Peru in 2006. That represents 58 percent of the South American country's total supply. "The United States continues to be the main market for fresh Peruvian asparagus," she notes. Although it's available year-round, 85 percent comes into the United States from July through January. The remaining 15 percent comes in throughout the rest of the year, she adds.

Peruvian asparagus has helped make asparagus a year-round crop, according to Don Hessel, gener-

al manager for Mission Asparagus, LLC, Oxnard, CA. "As a marketer, we wanted to offer it year-round," he says about Mission's decision to start supplying Peruvian asparagus for the first time this year. "In order to have it year-round, you really need to be dealing with Peru. They do a good job and they produce a quality product that suits the needs of U.S. consumers."

Charlie Eagle, vice president of business development, for Southern Specialties, Inc., Pompano, FL, agrees with this assessment. "Peru does a great job with asparagus. They have a great growing season. Peruvian asparagus is a healthful, desirable, flavorful product that has enjoyed an increased audience in the past few years."

As the demand for Peruvian asparagus continues to increase, experts say retailers should keep these five marketing tips in mind:

## 1. INFORM WITH PACKAGING AND SIGNAGE

From the boxes used to ship the product to the bags inside the boxes to the signs inside the store, there are many advertising opportunities to make asparagus a best seller.

According to Michael Warren, president of Central American Produce Inc., Pompano Beach, FL, many shippers are providing attractive messages to consumers on their boxes, labels and tags. He advises supermarkets to use these to highlight the attributes of Peruvian asparagus and supplement their in-store signage.

"Shippers are getting more involved with high-graphic presentations containing information, and it's good for the consumer to have as much information as possible," Warren says. "The shipper either has these little tags that clip onto the elastics and have some information on them, or they use a high-graphic cellophane wrap. Even though the actual signage the customer might first see [in the store] doesn't say it, what they take home will almost always say 'Peruvian asparagus.'"

Daniel Whittles, director of marketing and prod-



uct development of Rosemont Farms, Boca Raton, FL, says distributors' value-added packaging helps promote the sale of Peruvian asparagus. Rosemont offers pre-washed, ready-to-eat Peruvian green asparagus spears and tips and white asparagus with instructions telling consumers all they have to do is "Peel, heat, and eat." The clear directions on the latter product

**"Still to this day, I go into a supermarket and have to hunt for asparagus, up and down the produce aisles trying to find it. And then it blends in if they have it near lettuces, which they do a lot of the time."**

— John Campbell-Barmmer  
Chestnut Hill Farms

make it easier to sell white asparagus in the United States since Americans are more familiar with the lower-maintenance green asparagus, says Whittles.

"Many importers of fresh Peruvian asparagus have included value-added programs to their product lines," Lleras adds. "Value-added programs are one of the avenues for industry market growth. They will reach many more households, therefore resulting in additional revenue for retailers. The value-added programs provide the consumer with additional opportunities, specifically highlighting convenience and savings."

John Campbell-Barmmer, director of marketing for Chestnut Hill Farms, Miami, FL, thinks more emphasis could be put on asparagus. "Still to this day, I go into a supermarket and have to hunt for asparagus, up and down the produce aisles trying to find it. And then it blends in if they have it near lettuces, which they do a lot of the time. You can't see it because of the green. So better signage, to me that's important — better signage means showing where the product is, announcing the product."

## 2. OFFER VARIETIES

Offering an assortment of asparagus

# Help For Earthquake Victims

**A**lthough industry experts, including Priscilla Lleras, coordinator for the Peruvian Asparagus Importer's Association (PAIA), Keller, TX, believe the recent earthquake to strike Peru will not greatly impact the asparagus supply to the United States, many are making efforts to support those impacted by the disaster.

Hurley Neer, vice president of sales for Rosemont Farms, Boca Raton, FL, recently returned from Peru and is teaming up with PAIA to put together relief supplies.

According to Daniel Whittles, Rosemont director of marketing and product development, "Ica and Trujillo are the two main cities where our growers operate. Of the two locations, Ica has been severely devastated. Trujillo is winding down with its supplies as we speak and is not in the central area of damage. Ica, however, is gearing up for its spring crop. It's dealing with the aftermath of the quake, and still the asparagus will come."

Whittles advises retailers to support the stricken areas by continuing to purchase Peruvian asparagus. "The people involved in the asparagus industry in Peru are doing everything possible to keep the supply of high-quality asparagus exports steady," he says. "This product is truly one of great importance to the economy there, especially to the workers involved at the field and packing levels of the supply chain. There will be ample volume for promotion, and the pricing should lend itself to good promo opportunities at the retail level over the next four months."

"We are directing some of our aid through the PAIA and some directly to our counterparts, growers and associates in Peru. The groundswell of support throughout the industry in general has been phenomenal, and it is critical. Many people there are without homes, without water, without food or basic medical supplies," he continues.

**pb**

options is likely to induce more consumers to make an asparagus purchase.

Rosemont's Whittles believes variety is key. "We have up to five different SKUs, with some retailers including white asparagus, grilling asparagus, the value-added product line and bunched. The win-win-win here is for retailers to commit to attractive pricing and volume through promotions, for the consumers to have a great eating experience that results in repeat sales, and for that to further support the asparagus industry in general, and Peruvian asparagus specifically. Many retailers like to have a broader presence so that a single commodity doesn't get lost in the crowd."

Retailers can excite consumers more if they offer them choices rather than just rows of "the traditional naked bunches of asparagus," Southern's Eagle points out. Providing customers with a wider variety creates value and the potential for a higher ring at the register, he adds.

White asparagus is gaining popularity in the United States, Campbell-Barmmer says, noting, "I don't think anybody besides Peru even produces white because it's so labor intensive." Once asparagus breaks through the ground, it is buried again, causing it to be "bleached." The sun prompts chlorophyll production and that turns asparagus green, he explains.

Purple asparagus is another fairly exotic asparagus option. "We're going to be testing

it this year," Campbell-Barmmer says. The purple variety is from a more expensive seed that produces an altogether different, sweeter taste. "People want things that are new, so I think it has potential. What the difference is going to be in retail is the \$64,000 question right now, so we'll just have to see how that shapes up. If we can sell it to retailers, and they sell it for between \$2.99 and \$3.99 a pound, I believe it would sell."

Campbell-Barmmer suggests retailers offer several packaging sizes. He laments there's usually just one box of 1-pound bunches out at a time. "It's basically treated like an exotic. We're trying to focus on changing that by getting different product formats out there. I've been in this business for over 40 years, and there are just incredible parallels to the more you display, the more you sell. Have it out there. A lot of retailers just relegate it to the wet rack, one box at a time."

## 3. SHOW VALUE

Central American Produce's Warren contends asparagus is more affordable than many consumers think and it is important to make them aware of this fact.

"Many times consumers come in, see the price and think \$4 for a package of asparagus is high, but when they think about that bunch of asparagus or a package of asparagus, it can really feed a family of four or five

*Continued on page 136*

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Reader Service #55



*Continued from page 133*

people. It's not that expensive per person," he explains. "If retailers can get that message across to the consumer — so they're not comparing a \$2 broccoli to a \$5 asparagus — I think that would help the consumer make the purchase."

Chestnut Hill's Campbell-Barmmer calls the consistent pricing of asparagus a plus. "The pricing has remained constant over the period of the last seven, eight years," he says. "Basically, the average price per pound seems to be in the area of about \$2.99 to \$3.99, depending on whether someone's on promotion or not. It hasn't really varied a lot."

Southern's Eagle believes retailers can better communicate the value of asparagus by marketing its versatility. He describes typical asparagus consumers as highly educated people who enjoy luxury items. "Show them asparagus is healthful and diverse. It can be grilled — you can't grill broccoli and cauliflower. Asparagus can also be steamed or sautéed. Unlike other vegetables, asparagus really has that wow factor."

#### 4. MAKE SURE IT'S FRESH

Central American Produce's Warren stresses the importance of refrigeration. "The ideal thing is not to break the cold chain in a product like asparagus. Because most Peruvian asparagus is air shipped and because it is subject to fumigation on arrival — whether it came in by container or air shipment or container — getting the aspara-

gus into refrigeration is extremely important. So is hydrating it — make sure it's hydrated before it leaves the facility and goes on the road to the customer."

Campbell-Barmmer notes asparagus is mostly water "like a banana, so it can lose that water very quickly."

Frank A. Ramos, owner and president of The Perishable Specialist, Doral, FL, helps Peruvian asparagus make it to the market in the best state possible once it arrives in the U.S. A customs broker that specializes in perishables, The Perishable Specialist's services include refrigeration.

"I take care of clearing customs, clearing FDA [Food and Drug Administration], and setting up the product to get fumigated as a condition of entry [per the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)]," explains Ramos.

"Once the product arrives into Miami International Airport, we place it in a refrigerated container that has been geared specially for fumigations. We load this trailer with USDA supervision at the airline. Once it is loaded, the trailer gets sealed by the USDA inspector and moved to the fumigation site, where the fumigation company does the fumigation with USDA supervision on-site at all times."

After addressing clearances and the fumigation process, the company delivers the produce to importers' warehouses per their instructions. "My personnel baby-sits the asparagus from the minute it lands to the minute it's out of fumigation," he says. "The Perishable Specialist expedites the product getting to the coolers and getting to the facilities as quickly as possible so it can get to the retailer that much faster. It's a 24-hour service. It's around the clock, so the asparagus never sits and waits unnecessarily."

According to Warren, asparagus continues to grow, even after it's been cut and put in the box, so it should be hydrated at the store level. He suggests standing the vegetable up in ice or water while it's on display. "You give it water, it will still continue to grow," he says, noting this is the best-looking presentation as well.

Campbell-Barmmer agrees. "It's good for

the product, and it also creates a real fresh appearance. It's not that you have to, but it's good merchandising. You just display it in a bucket of crushed ice." Laying it down in water, he feels, is wasting space, since asparagus takes water in through the bottom like a tree. "The whole idea there is to turn it fast, that day or the next day." But just in case, he adds, ice and proper refrigeration will add to its shelf life.

#### 5. USE AVAILABLE RESOURCES

Stores can also increase sales of Peruvian asparagus by ensuring consumers see it as a high-quality product.

"I think it's generally known throughout the country that Peru is the main country to export asparagus and that it's a good product," says Warren. "They're very professional in how they grow it and package it. The retailers know it's a good, dependable, consistent product, and that's when they put it out on their shelves, they should have a very good sell-through."

"We believe in the asparagus as a great commodity, and we do our best to help promote it and stay involved in the industry," Warren continues. Central American Produce has imported products from Central and South America for 30 years.

"Peru is a real success story, and it's grown tremendously in the period of the last three to five years, but it gets stronger and stronger every year," adds Campbell-Barmmer. "They set the standard now for California and Washington as well as Mexico for quality. It's just an all-around success story."

To add to their own success, retailers may want to ramp up their strategies for selling Peruvian asparagus by looking to a map of sorts put out by the PAIA. The *Category Management Plan Outline for Fresh Peruvian Asparagus* is an invaluable tool.

"The outline identifies market growth and trends, industry facts, as well as information that will aid retailers in the marketing and promotion for Peruvian asparagus, ultimately assisting in their efforts to increased sales," Lleras says. "The category plan outline provides consumers with information pertaining to the nutritional value of fresh Peruvian asparagus."

"Available through the PAIA, the plan also includes market summaries, Peruvian asparagus industry facts, consumer positioning, category definitions and strategies, a monthly ad planner, suggested goals and objectives, key product and consumer demographics, information on the cold-chain distribution process, and other important statistical information relating to the asparagus industry," she continues. **pb**

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# Consumer Demand Leads To New Juices

*Companies continue to develop new blends and products.*

BY SUZY LOONAM

## **Innovative juice companies are discovering new and healthful juices, revamping traditional juices and creating new juice blends to promote wellness and longevity.**

Consumers are paying premium prices for these immune-boosting, cancer-fighting, youth-restoring blends enhanced with and by vitamins, minerals, fiber, antioxidants and a variety of nutrients.

While some juice manufacturers are searching the world for new super-juice ingredients, others are finding success in unfamiliar domestic juices or by creating new interest in old favorites.

Traditional juices such as citrus and apple have long been staples, but recently a plethora of out-of-the-ordinary juices have entered the market.

First came cranberry with its proanthocyanidins for urinary tract health, followed by blueberry juices and its anti-aging properties and antioxidant-laden pomegranate. In 2006, açai became the new pomegranate. Unfortunately, açai fell a little short in appeal. Though products with açai are still selling well, the predicted açai-tinis and frappe açai never came to be.

So what's next in the category? Industry innovators (in alphabetical order) share their predictions.

### **BARSOTTI JUICE COMPANY**

Smaller companies are feeling the pressure to keep up with market trends and are thinking "outside the box." Mike Barsotti, president, Barsotti Juice Company, Camino, CA, has hired a consulting firm to help determine marketing strategies. "We're going to explore whether to change or take advantage of our family image."

Mike's sister, Cathy Barsotti-Dooling, recently joined the

company as vice president of sales and marketing, bringing another source for innovation and sales growth in Barsotti's near-future.

### **FRUTZZO**

"We are truly juice innovators," says Terry Xanthos, president, COO and co-founder of Frutzzo, Alpine, UT. "We were first in the world with organic pomegranate juice, and the first to bring in açai." Now, the company with "Fight free radicals" as its motto is the first to bring yumberry juice — the latest "super-juice" — to North America.

For more than 2,000 years, the subtropical fruit has been harvested in May and June in the mountains of Zhejiang, China. "Yumberry" may sound like a marketing gimmick, but Xanthos says it is derived from the fruit's Asian name, "yungberry."

"We're excited about yumberrries because the level of antioxidants is similar to açai and the finished level of sugars is similar to blueberries," Xanthos explains. Yumberrries are more manageable than açai because yumberrries have more juice and better taste.

Frutzzo yumberrries are carefully selected, pressed, de-pectinized, filtered, pasteurized and purified within 24 hours of harvest to ensure quality and preserve nutrients; then the processed berries are shipped to North America. The final product is a dark-red 100-percent juice with no preservatives, added sugars or added colors.

Frutzzo introduced organic yumberry juices in early September, and natural yumberry juices two weeks later. The company has contracts for about 75 percent of the world's yumberry supply and the new product has been well received by key retailers, Xanthos says.

### **MAPLE LANE FARMS**

Allyn Brown, III, owner of Maple Lane Farms, Preston, CT, will not be looking to exotic ingredients to grow his share of the juice market. Instead, this first-generation farmer and owner of North America's largest grower of black currants will stick



to what works for his business.

Widely consumed in Europe and New Zealand, black currants are unfamiliar to most Americans, Brown says. The black currant is native to North America but was banned in the late 1800s because it was thought to be an alternate host for white pine blister rust, a threat to white pines. New York was the largest producer of black currants at that time, but "the federal government destroyed whole plantations without a whole lot of proof," he explains. The federal ban was lifted in the 1980s, leaving currant restriction up to each state.

Maple Lane's black currant juice sales have been increasing steadily for about two and half years, but "it's been slow going because we use only our own fruit," Brown explains. Each year, his crop gets a little larger. All his black currant crops are grown in Connecticut, perfect for the once-forbidden fruit that requires a certain number of chilling-degree days to thrive.

Black currant juice may be less exotic than many of the new juices on the market today, but it is no less a super-juice. Research shows black currants have more antioxidants than blueberries, three times the vitamin C in oranges and significant amounts of vitamins B6 and E, potassium, copper and soluble fiber. They're rich in

anthocyanins, known for their outstanding anti-inflammatory benefits.

Brown plans to introduce a 100-percent juice blend of apple and black currant. A new cranberry-black currant blend and smaller portioned packaging are next, he says.

### NATALIE'S ORCHID ISLAND JUICE CO.

Natalie's Orchid Island Juice Company, Fort Pierce, FL, is sticking to basics — pure, natural, fresh-squeezed citrus juices. "Fresh-squeezed orange, grapefruit and citrus juices are nutritionally sound products. Why would we want to change that?" asks John Martinelli, executive vice president.

"Our products are the most natural," he says. "If you could pick a product off a tree, squeeze it into a glass and drink it, that would be the most natural way to drink it. Because citrus juice is very easy to extract, we can keep it natural as fresh-squeezed. It's as natural as you can get. We are all-natural, and many of the other products in the juice aisle are not."

The company will introduce a new tangerine juice and new packaging at the Newark, DE-based Produce Marketing Association's (PMA) Fresh Summit in October, "but it's not very glamorous. We think pack-

aging is more about sales than nutrition, and we'd rather focus on what's in the carton than what's on it. The quality of the product in the jug is our highest priority."

### NOBLE JUICE

Noble Juice, Winter Haven, FL, is another small juice company with plans to showcase packaging innovations and other new products at PMA Fresh Summit.

For its natural fresh and fresh organic citrus juices, Noble is the first juice company in the United States to use a biodegradable 32-ounce container made from PLA, a plastic resin derived from corn sugar. Introduced in 2006, Noble's "E-Bottle" is soon to be adorned with new labels, also made from PLA. "We're using a resource that is annually renewable and saves energy," says Allison Lee, marketing manager. "We've had really good success with it."

The E-Bottle will not be rolled out nationally any time soon, as there is a limited supply of material. "It's pretty much sold out," explains Wade Groetsch, president, "but there is enough support for us and our growth due to an early partnership with the supplier."

At Noble, tangerine juice is the up-and-coming flavor. "There are some really neat things on the horizon for tangerine juice,"

  
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Reader Service # 201

Groetsch adds.

Thanks to an unexpected plug from Oprah Winfrey this year, tangerines were reborn as an ingredient in a new summer drink she named the "Tang-O-rita." "We're excited about that because we believe tangerine is a great product. It's nice to see the product and the fruit getting some attention," Groetsch says. "Consumers see all these other exotic products out there." He plans to do all he can to make tangerine "the new juice."

"The tangerine has always been the second cousin to orange juice, but there are unique health properties in tangerines," Groetsch continues. "Preliminary studies on the health benefits of tangerines indicate there are some components of tangerine peel that can kill cancer cells, and certain antioxidants in tangerines may help with

brain cell regeneration in Alzheimer's patients."

At PMA, Noble will showcase two new products, Cranberry-Tangerine Juice and Blood Orange Juice. Noble is also working with the National Heart Lung and Blood Institute's Heart Truth Campaign to promote heart health for women. "We have such an opportunity to communicate better with women," Groetsch says. "Heart disease is the No. 1 issue in women's health, and as an industry, we don't do enough to promote the complete nutrition of juice."

### PACIFIC ORGANIC PRODUCE/ PURITY.ORGANIC JUICE

Pacific Organic/Purity.Organic Juice, San Francisco, CA, has launched two new organic juice blends enhanced with vitamins and nutrients. "We're real excited

about what we're doing," notes founder and CEO Greg Holzman about the world's first organic, juice-based energy drinks. "We are the only organic tree-fruit marketer in America. The right way to do that is to use organic process grades that offer good return to the grower. We're very proud of that. When and where we can, we use the fruit we work with at Purity."

Holzman plans to support all his grower-partners "from the bottom up," using organic fruit from Pacific Organic in Purity.Organic juice blends. The organic juice and water products, called functional drinks, offer a lighter alternative to rich fruit juices, he says, and are rightfully sold in the produce department due to their organic juice bases. Functional drinks are a part of an organic hydration line of enhanced juice drinks that offer vitamins, antioxidants and low sugar.



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Each of the four functional drinks has a specific purpose: Pomegranate Blueberry for memory, Acerola Cherry for immunity, Pomegranate Raspberry for energy and Orange Mango Tangerine for restoration.

"People first saw us as a grocery item," he says, "then we realized that produce sections were serving our juice." Retailers such as Austin, TX-based Whole Foods are selling the product in the produce department, Holzman adds.

Purity Organic juices are flash pasteurized to ensure a one-year shelf life with no additives or preservatives. The juices and juice drinks are currently sold throughout New York City, New England, Northern California, Chicago, the Mid-Atlantic, Seattle, Portland and the Midwest. Looking ahead, the company is considering new bilingual packaging and possible entry into the Cana-

dian market.

### RED JACKET ORCHARDS

Red Jacket Orchards is a Geneva, NY-based on-orchard manufacturer with a long history of family management and a bright future in the manufacture of juices and ciders. "It's who we are that makes us different," says Brian Nicholson, vice president of marketing. "Because we are an orchard and grew from the orchard, we are very close to the product."

Red Jacket produces its line of minimally processed, freshly pressed juices and ciders in small batches with no concentrates, added sweeteners, color or flavoring. Apples are pressed on-site at the sprawling 600-acre orchard, thriving in what he calls "the incredible growing region known as the Finger Lakes."

While apple juice and cider are nothing new, Red Jacket products fit perfectly within modern health trends. "Our juices are 100-percent orchard fresh, made with whole fruit," Nicholson explains. "Juices are flash pasteurized, and there is no water added. Because the apple base is fresh, we have soluble fiber in our juice, and there is 5 percent pectin in the apple that doesn't get cooked out." Natural soluble fiber slows the body's absorption of sugar.

The orchard was originally planted along the rolling hills of Seneca Lakes in 1917. The Nicholson Family has managed it and the juice company since 1958.

In addition to apples, the company "nurture and handpicks" apricots, peaches, plums, raspberries, rhubarb, strawberries, sweet and sour cherries and summer and Italian plum tomatoes.

**pb**

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Reader Service # 176

SPECIAL SECTION



All photos courtesy of Greater Houston Convention and Visitors Bureau

Above: Quattro Restaurant

# TOP PICKS FOR DINING *In Houston*

Produce industry locals share their favorite Houston dining spots.

BY SANDY LINDBLAD LEE

**S**earching for that perfect dining experience to enjoy with associates while in Houston? The Houston metropolitan area has the potential to satisfy even the most discerning taste buds by serving up a delicious array of fare from traditional to ultra-chic. And to help Produce Marketing Association Fresh Summit attendees, members of the Houston fresh produce industry recommend their favorite restaurants.



The overwhelming favorite dining establishments among the industry insiders surveyed were the Pappas restaurants, including Pappasito's Cantina, Pappadeau Seafood Kitchen, Pappas Seafood House, Pappas Bros. Steakhouse and Pappas Bar-B-Q. Locals say this local restaurant group provides not only great service but also—and most importantly—scrumptious and consistent entrées.

"Pappasito's Cantina is the most popular Mexican restaurant," says Kent Vandervort, general manager of foodservice at Schoenmann Produce Company, Inc., Houston, TX.

Voted No. 1 Mexican Restaurant for several years in several Texas publications, Pappasito's Cantina is famous for its Texas-size portions of sizzling fajitas, margaritas "and some of the best chips and salsa north of the Rio Grande," Vandervort adds.

A favorite among Cajun restaurants, Pappadeaux Seafood Kitchen provides diners "with fresh seafood and Louisiana-style favorites like blackened catfish Opelousas fillet, crawfish and shrimp 'fondue,'" Vandervort reports.

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center. Vandervort says it offers patrons "a lively atmosphere and true Texas hospitality. It's a favorite for slow-smoked, pit barbecues with all the trimmings."

Robert Killian of Dallas, TX-based Hardin's Fruit & Vegetable Co., a foodservice-focused produce distributor, recommends Pappas Bros. Steakhouse. "An art deco interior sets this steakhouse apart from the pretenders, and it has brass accents and dark woods." Featured entrées include an 18-ounce New York strip steak, fresh lobster, marinated veal chop and prime rib. The restaurant's wine list offers more than 2,300 selections. "Save room for something special from the dessert menu," Killian advises.

Highlighting more of his favorites, Schoenmann's Vandervort points to the Salt Grass Steakhouse and Bob's Chop



Above: Churrasco's Restaurant



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Don Bertrand, who works in the Houston office of Pittsburgh, PA-based Tom Lange Company, includes Vic & Anthony's among his favorites. Houston's Downtown Aquarium provides patrons with a memorable dining experience while viewing a giant, saltwater aquarium full of exotic fish, he adds.

Quattro Restaurant, located in downtown Houston's Four Seasons Hotel, also gains a high spot on the list of recommended restaurants. "Stylish and elegant with a contemporary edge, Quattro couples spectacular Italian cuisine with unpretentious surroundings and service," Vandervort notes. "Famous for its antipasti



Above: Vic & Anthony's Restaurant

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Above: Marks American Cuisine

bar, fantastic wines and sumptuous seafood tower, Quattro lays out quite a feast."

For sushi cravers, Ra Sushi is Vandervort's first choice. He also emphasizes that PMA attendees cannot go wrong by dining in one of the eateries situated inside one of the several boutique-type hotels within walking distance of downtown Houston's Hilton, the convention's designated hotel.

Steve Grinstead, president and CEO of Pro\*Act, Monterey, CA, is a frequent Houston-area diner. In addition to the Pappas restaurants, Grinstead suggests NOE to those seeking American/Asian fare. "Arturo's is a good choice for Italian food, and Churrasco's has a South American theme," he adds.

Grinstead says his favorite Churrasco's entrées include South American-style ceviche with hearts of palm, black bean-stuffed empanadas, sliced roasted duck breast and churrasco beef. "The crowd tends to get thick quickly, so it's best to come early — or call ahead for reservations," he emphasizes.

sizes.

"Tony's is good for steak and seafood, and Cap Grille is a chain, but it's always good," Grinstead adds, making sure to list The Palm among his favorites.

Another favorite of Tom Lange's Bertrand is Mark's American Cuisine on Westheimer Road. Occupying a former church, Mark's boasts striking architecture and dishes that offer an innovative twist on classics, such as bourbon-glaze pork tenderloin and five pepper-crusted Scottish salmon.

Among the most renowned dining establishments is Brennan's of Houston. Some say its food and ambiance outdo the original Brennan's in New Orleans. Patrons can expect wonderful Creole fare with Texas touches. The atmosphere is upscale and romantic, and the courtyard is particularly engaging. With advance notice, guests can dine at the chef's table, which offers views of all the culinary happenings in the kitchen, along with a special meal.

"The creative menu never fails to satisfy," Schoenmann's Vandervort notes. "Some of the favorites are lamb chops, pecan-crusted amberjack, lump crab cakes and veal chops."

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# Nine Ways To Sell More Apples

*There's always room for growth, even in a mature category.*

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

**S**ell more fruit, for a higher price, in a category that is already one of the top contributors to total produce sales? What could be more appealing?

"We're coming off a fantastic year with excellent quality, record prices and good demand. The way the 2007 crop is unfolding, expect a repeat of last year or an even better year than last," forecasts Jim Cranney, vice president of the U.S. Apple Association (USAApple), Vienna, VA.

Industry forecasts project a 212.5 million bushel crop, according to statistics released at the 2007 U.S. Apple Association Crop Outlook and Marketing Conference, held August 23-24 in Chicago, IL.

The apple category's dollar contribution to total produce sales hit 6.44 percent for the 52-week period ending June 1, 2007, up 12 percent over the same time period a year before according to the Perishables Group, West Dundee, IL.

"Demand is outstanding," says Chuck Sinks, president of sales and marketing for Sage Fruit Company LLC, Yakima, WA. "Apples are really selling good and moving quickly."

## 1. STOCK THE BIG FIVE

The mix of apple varieties consumers want today has dramatically changed from a decade ago, says Steve Lutz, executive vice president, Perishables Group. "Newer apple varieties are energizing and growing the category. Legacy varieties are not losing dollar sales, but they're not growing at the rate of the newer varieties."

Sandy Cohen, president, Cohen Produce Marketing, Aspers, PA, observes, "There's much more parity today. No one variety dominates; rather its six to nine varieties that are all right up there in demand."

• **Gala ranks first in dollar sales for the 52-week period ending June 1, according to the Perishables Group.**

"Our best selling apple is Gala, followed by Red Delicious, Granny Smith, Golden



**Mix, display and promotion can spur sales even in a mature category like apples.**

Delicious, Fuji and Braeburn," notes Kevin Wright, merchandising manager, Champaign, IL-based W. Newell & Co., a specialty produce distribution company owned by Minneapolis, MN-based Supervalu.

"Among the staple variety apples, the three sub-tier SKUs that continue to show strong increases for us are Gala, Fuji and Braeburn," notes Brian Gannon, director of produce and floral, Big Y Supermarkets, a 49-store chain based in Springfield, MA

Hardiness and widespread cultivation have spurred Gala's popularity. "Gala can take a lot of abuse in terms of temperature and handling and not show it," relates Bob Mast, director of marketing, Columbia Marketing International (CMI), Inc., Wenatchee, WA. "Plantings are up in Washington."

In the Midwest, Gala also holds strong. According to Tom Pletcher, vice president of sales and marketing, Belle Harvest Sales, Belding, MI, "Gala is the next big variety for us after Red Delicious with about 1 million bushels forecast this season."

• **Red Delicious ranks second in dollar sales for the 52-week period ending June 1, according to the Perishables Group.**

Long synonymous with the word apple, Red Delicious will never go the way of the

dinosaur, says Loren Queen, marketing and communications manager, Domex Superfresh Growers, Yakima, WA. "The reduction of acreage we've seen in the past is settling out and what is planted in Washington are the thinner-skinned, better-eating strains."

Andy Tudor, director of sales, L&M Northwest, Selah, WA, adds, "SmartFresh technology has helped Red Delicious maintain its crunch longer into the year."

It is the top volume apple in Pennsylvania. "We think the taste of an Eastern Red Delicious is distinctive," states Fred Hess, owner, Hess Bros. Fruit Co., Lancaster, PA.

• **Granny Smith ranks third for the 52-week period ending June 1, according to the Perishables Group.**

"Granny Smiths are the biggest dollar generator for us, beyond the locally popular favorites," says Gannon. "Customers prefer them for their flavor when eating out-of-hand and for cooking."

Granny Smith is the biggest volume apple grown in California. According to Bob Maxwell, sales manager, Kingsburg Orchards, Kingsburg, CA, "We can't get the blush on Gala and Fuji like they can in the Northwest, but our climate — warm days and cool nights — is conducive to growing a

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good green granny."

- Fuji is the fourth in dollar sales for the 52-week period ending June 1, according to the Perishables Group.

"Fuji was always a powerhouse on the West Coast where it has a strong following with the Asian population. Now it's grown on the East Coast, too, and has demand nationwide," relates Roger Pepperl, marketing director, Stemilt Growers, Inc., Wenatchee, WA.

- Golden Delicious rounds out the top five apples, with dollar sales increasing by 0.9 percent over the 52-week

period ending June 1, according to the Perishables Group.

## 2. INCLUDE VARIETALS

Of the up-and-coming varietals, Honeycrisp continues to create buzz nationwide. Sweet taste, crunchy texture, juicy flesh and limited-time availability in the fall and early winter are sales-generating attributes.

"We've seen good growth on Honeycrisp. It's gaining consumer confidence and they're willing to pay a premium price for it," says Newell's Wright.

Honeycrisp is priced on the average

## Demos And Cross-Promotions

Taste samples translate into sales.

"Because of the high brix we get in Colorado-grown apples, taste sampling is a big merchandising tool for us," explains Jonathan Allen, president, First Fruits International Ltd., Montrose, CO. "We've done demos in King Soopers, Safeway, Wild Oats, Whole Foods and a number of other smaller retail chains."

The New York Apple Association (NYAA), Fishers, NY, will conduct many in-store demos this season, notes Dave McClurg, vice president of marketing. "We'll be taking Empire to supermarkets in the Midwest and South. We've conducted over 1000 demos with McIntosh and Honeycrisp. This grassroots effort has been effective to increase sales."

Stacie Haaga, RD, director of consumer health and education, U.S. Apple Association (USAApple), Vienna, VA, recommends, "Cross-merchandise apples with bagged salads in combination with walnuts and bleu cheese crumbles."

Cheese, wine and varietal apples are the big cross merchandising trend this year. Kevin Precht, marketing program director, Cameo Apple Marketing Association (CAMA), Wenatchee, WA describes how to accomplish this: "Tie in Cameo apples, wine and high-end cheeses such as Gruyère and Camembert. Our retail partners have done this in one of two ways. First, and most popular, they displayed Cameos on an end cap in the produce department and merchandised the cheese and wine in a cooler rack across the top of the apple display. Second, retailers placed large baskets of Cameos in the gourmet cheese case with wine nearby. Concurrent with the display, they all ran front-page ads that utilized our artwork showing all three items and how they could be served together."

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from \$2.49 to \$2.99 per pound, while many other apple varieties retail for \$1.50 per pound or less.

Terry Braithwaite, director of marketing, Chelan Fresh Marketing, Chelan, WA, agrees Honeycrisp has really taken off in recent years. "Consumers really like them," he says. "They've got a different flavor and a different look to them."

Honeycrisp dollar sales increased 78 per-



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cent for the 52-week period ending June 1, according to the Perishables Group. By comparison, Braeburn grew 29 percent, Cameo 28 percent and Pink Lady 5 percent. Adverse weather affected the latter.

Braeburns, according to Newell's Wright, "experienced a lot of growth with us last year. It's a local variety that's been gaining volume outside the region."

Cameo, a variety nearly exclusive to Washington state, is projected to produce 1.3 million cartons this year, predicts Kevin Precht, marketing program director, Cameo Apple Marketing Association (CAMA),

Wenatchee, WA. "With the state's overall crop down, this means good promotional opportunities for Cameo."

CAMA commissioned a study over the past year that looked how Cameo fits into the new apple varietal order. Apple varieties were divided into three sub-segments — introductory, established and emerging, with Cameo classified as emerging. In all regions of the country, the emerging sub-segment showed the strongest growth, with a national average of 23.8 percent; Cameo was the strongest performer of this group.

A 25 percent increase, or nearly 2.4 mil-

lion cartons, in Washington's crop of Pink Lady apples is forecast for this year, says Alan Taylor, marketing director, Pink Lady America, Wapato, WA. "There have been some improvements to earlier varieties, ones that start harvest in October, and this can help alleviate problems in the future with late season freeze loss."

On the import front, notes David Nelle, director of the pipfruit category, Oppenheimer Group, Vancouver, BC, Canada, "Jazz is by far and away the most popular variety we sell, followed by Royal Gala, Pacific Rose, Braeburn and Fuji."

### 3. MARKET REGIONALLY GROWN

"We try to carry six to seven regionally grown apples in addition to a dozen varieties from Washington," says Newell's Wright. "During some times of the year, retailers will carry two or more of the same variety — for example, a Red Delicious from Michigan and Washington and perhaps a Honeycrisp from Washington, Michigan and New York."

Sage's Sinks believes marketing regionally grown varieties is important "because it makes the connection with local-grown products and helps tie the whole community together."

The Northeast grows several varieties that have long been popular locally and that will probably benefit from the current consumer desire for locally grown produce.

"In the Northeast, when the local apples present themselves, they become the leaders of the category," notes Big Y's Gannon. "McIntosh is the preferred apple by many."

Peter Gregg, spokesman, New York Apple Association (NYAA), Fishers, NY, says, "McIntosh is our bread-and-butter variety, although Empire is enjoying a renaissance."

"Cortland is making a comeback and is now a major volume apple in the region," notes Lee Peters, vice president of sales and marketing, Fowler Bros., Inc., Wolcott, NY. "It responds well to SmartFresh and keeps well into the late spring and early summer."

The apple industry in Colorado has declined to 10 percent of what it was 20 years ago, says Jonathan Allen, president, Montrose, CO-based First Fruits International Ltd. and chairman of the Colorado Apple Administrative Committee, Delta, CO. However, "The 150,000 to 250,000 apples per year we do produce have a high brix due to being grown at elevations of 5000 to 7000 feet. This makes our Gala, Fuji, Pink Lady and Honeycrisp big sellers in regional markets, especially under the *Colorado Proud* marketing banner."

"The fuel cost of distributing apples closer to their source of harvest is definitely an

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\$1.59	\$3.70	\$2.66	
\$1.69	\$3.93	\$2.83	

39%

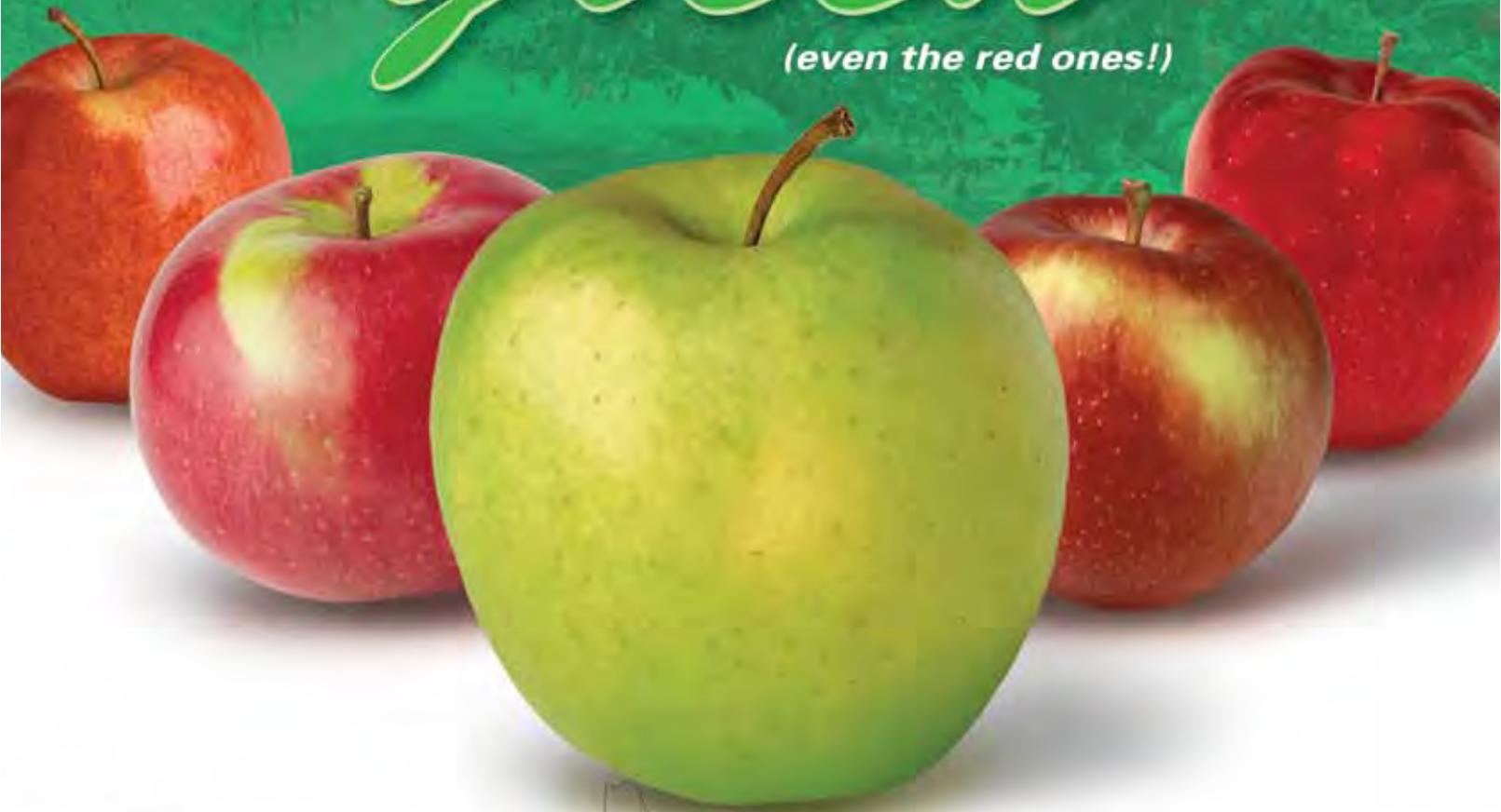


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# Size Matters

**T**here is a market for all sizes of apples.

"The domestic customer prefers 64- to 80-count apples. We're fortunate Cameo is a variety that naturally sizes larger," notes Kevin Precht, marketing program director, Cameo Apple Marketing Association (CAMA), Wenatchee, WA.

Sizing depends on variety, according to Andy Tudor, director of sales, L&M Northwest, Selah, WA. "For example, Gala apples typically grow to 100s and 113s. It's harder to meet retail demand for 64s or 72s of this variety. Some retailers have started to catch on, though, and are getting good deals by buying apple varieties at their peak sizes."

"With premium varieties like Jazz and

Pacific Rose, consumers are choosing sizes considered untraditional," observes David Nolley, director of the pipfruit category, Oppenheimer Group, Vancouver, BC, Canada. "Rather than buying six large-size apples, a shopper might instead choose a few large for the adults and a few small for the kids."

Desire for large apples can have a seasonal dimension. Retailers often look for larger or extra large fruit for gift baskets and fruit bowls, says John Schaefer, president, Jack Brown Produce, Inc., Sparta, MI, "in the run up to the winter holidays."

Mike Kemp, director of produce at Save-A-Lot, a 1,252-store chain based in St. Louis, MO, and a subsidiary of Supervalu, orders small-sized apples for back-

to-school promotions. "We'll run multiples for a buck. We'll also have a 'special buy' sign that alerts customers. This makes it easier for parents to calculate the cost to prepare their children's lunches."

Size can dictate how some retailers merchandise apples, says Loren Queen, marketing and communications manager for Domex Superfresh Growers, Yakima, WA. "We'll typically see 72s to 88s for bulk display and 113s to 125s in bags."

This season, L&M will co-pack small-sized Gala, Granny Smith, Red Delicious, Fuji and Braeburn apples in high graphic tote bags that match a free-standing shipper under the Disney Garden My Size Mini brand label. "It's the small-fruit-for-small-hands idea," says Tudor. **pb**

"advantage," stresses Wright. "That regionally grown and locally grown appeal does help merchandise apples. But, I don't think sales of apples from farther away are being hampered by the food-mile issue."

#### 4. OFFER ORGANICS

Organics are a small but growing part of

the apple category.

"Organics are definitely increasing. It's one of our larger growing categories in general and apples are a huge part of this," explains Newell's Wright.

For conventional supermarkets, adds Gannon, "We need to have a good assortment of conventional apple SKUs, but that's

not to say we shouldn't work hard to provide consistent choices for our customers with regards to organics. However, until organics become very plentiful and costs get more in line with conventional, organics will continue to be a niche offering."

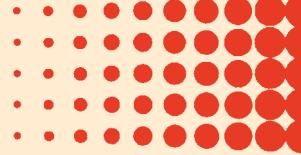
Niche is, indeed, still the rule in conventional supermarkets. According to Perish-

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ables Group data for the 52-week period ending Dec. 31, 2006, 3.1 percent of apples sold through conventional supermarkets were organic, up from 2.3 percent in 2005.

"In 2006, organic apples were stocked on average in 60 percent of conventional retail stores," says Perishables Group's Lutz. "This figure does vary by region. Eighty percent of conventional supermarkets in the East stock organic apples, with 50 percent in the South and 69 percent in the West. Increased distribution is needed to drive incremental sales."

"Look at organic carrots to envision where the category might go. Organic carrots are distributed to 88 percent of conventional supermarkets and represent 10 percent of total carrot category sales," he adds.

Sage's Sinks says retailers can better market their organic varieties by creating displays that are more of "an organic destination. It shouldn't be just a little bit here or there. Cross-merchandise organics within the produce department."

Stemilt's Pepperl agrees. "Regional and national chains have introduced organics in a big way, so we continue to notch it up on our end in new plantings and acreage in transition. By 2009, the production of organic apples in Washington should near 15 percent of the state's total crop."

The most popular organic apple vari-

eties, according to Gene Loudon, organic sales manager, Dovex Organics, Wenatchee, WA, "are Gala and Fuji. We also have varieties such as Red Delicious, Cripps Pink, Ambrosia, Jazz and Pacific Rose in organic. In general, the organic shopper likes to try new tastes and this translates to a desire for some of the newer varietals."

Precht says CAMA's goal is to take organic production to 10 percent of the total crop in the next few years.

The quality of organically grown Honeycrisp in Colorado is superb, says First Fruit's Allen. "Our growers can get three times the price for an organic Honeycrisp as they can other varieties. We could grow 10 times more and sell them at the same price without a blink."

Virtually all fresh-market organic apples in the nation are grown on the West Coast. "Climate conditions in the East, where we have a lot of humidity and fungal diseases, makes growing organics a challenge," notes Fowler's Peters.

## 5. PROFFER PACKAGES

When it comes to packaged apples, says John Schaefer, president, Jack Brown Produce, Inc., Sparta, MI, one size does not fit all, which is why apples are offered in bags, totes and clamshells.

However, says Belle Harvest's Pletcher, "Eastern states like Michigan, Pennsylvania and New York specialize in bags due to our typically smaller sized apples."

A new packing line will allow Fowler Farms to print bags with variety name, bar code, a merchandising message and, for the first time, traceback information.

Poly bags have predominated for years, but some retailers are switching to mesh. According to Newell's Wright, "We were one of the first to move to mesh. It displays well with uniformity and overall appeal. Breathability is also an advantage."

Color-coded mesh bags — red for Red Delicious, green for Granny Smith, yellow for Golden Delicious, etc. — have been adopted in major retail chains such as Albertson's, Safeway and Kroger.

The problem with poly, says Stemilt's Pepperl, "is that it can cloud and make it harder to see the apples inside. Also, it takes a certain knack to build a display of poly bags because they can easily roll. Mesh stacks easily."

On the other hand, adds Dave McClurg, NYAA's vice president of marketing, "I question if there might be more bruising in mesh because the apples can roll around more. Also, there's less room for consumer information on a mesh bag."

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Pletcher summarizes the status of many grower/shippers: "We've retrofitted our lines to produce mesh. But so far, customers haven't pushed us in one direction or the other, all mesh or all poly."

The multitude of packaging options also includes bag sizes. Suzanne Wolter, director of marketing, Rainier Fruit Co., Selah, WA, says, "We do a 5-count sleeve with 113 to 125 size apples targeted towards kid's lunches."

Conversely, says Barry Winkel, general manager, Greg Orchards, Benton Harbor, MI, "Trends are towards 8- to 10-pound bags of 3-inch diameter apples. For us, these are primarily Red Delicious and they move well in the winter, especially just after the first of the year."

Tote bags, says CMI's Mast, "are in higher use today. They offer that 'farm fresh' look, especially when merchandised on an end cap surrounding a bulk apple display."

Club stores continue as to be the primary sellers of clamshell-packed apples. "We don't see big growth in clamshells, but some retailers do want them for food-safety concerns," explains Domex's Queen.

## 6. HANDLE WITH CARE

Publix Super Markets, based in Lakeland, FL, was named 2007 Apple Merchandiser of the Year by USAApple's National Apple

Month. Its produce staff merchandises apples on refrigerated displays.

Most folks do not realize, says NYAA's McClurg, "that apples soften 10 times faster at room temperature than at 40°."

"The cold chain is very important for apples," adds Jack Brown's Schaefer. "We store the fruit at 33° to 34° until it gets either to the wholesaler or retailer in order to maintain quality."

Apples are not hardware and it is critical to prevent them from bruising. Big displays are nice, says Steve Riessen, president, Sun Orchard Fruit Company, Burt, NY, "but try not to stack apples more than two layers high. This can damage them. It's better to replenish the display more frequently."

## 7. OFFER VARIETY

Variety is the spice of life and the Publix buying team purchases a wide range of apple varieties from a number of states.

This need for variety, says Newell's Wright, "drives apple category sales as well as sales in the overall produce department."

An ever-expanding choice of apple varieties coupled with finite shelf space makes a game plan necessary when deciding what varieties to carry and when.

"First we offer fresh harvest," explains Big Y's Gannon. "Once that is done, we

accept apples out of controlled atmosphere. Generally, fresh through controlled-atmosphere local apples will last into April or June. Some varieties finish early, others hold up longer.

"Any variety stocked must have sales under it to justify space in the department. However, we will take in new cutting-edge apple varietals, feature them in-store with signage and positioning and see how they sell and what kind of comeback customers have. This approach creates more excitement in the overall category and peaks customers interest to try something new," he adds.

According to Stemilt's Pepperl, "Good retailers carry at minimum the five core varieties: Gala, Red Delicious, Granny Smith, Fuji and Golden Delicious. Beyond this, the mix is based on demographics, regionality and seasonality."

"Large stores will carry 12 varieties or more [in peak season]. A large display draws the eye, makes the mouth water and increases sales and profits. Small stores carry seven to eight varieties on average," notes Queen. "In the summer, imports are good shelf-space holders. It's advantageous to carry at least five to six varieties on a year-round basis."

"Keep the treasure hunt on," advises L&M's Tudor. "Captivate customers with that

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# Newer Apple Varieties Offer "Something Different"

**C**ustomers, and therefore retailers, "are always looking for that 'something new and different'. This will always be an important part of any produce category," notes Kevin Wright, merchandising manager, W. Newell & Co., Champaign, IL.

According to Gene Loudon, organic sales manager, Dovex Organics, Wenatchee, WA, breeding the latest and greatest apple that can make in-roads on the retail shelf next to stalwart mainline varieties "is a crystal ball process than can easily take 10 to 12 years at minimum."

Here are a few varieties that are emerging into commercial production:

**Ambrosia:** This Canadian-bred variety has a smooth skin with bright, almost iridescent pink blush over a creamy background. The flesh is crisp textured, juicy and distinctly honey flavored. "We're the exclusive grower of Ambrosia in the United States," says Bob Mast, director of marketing, Columbia Marketing International, Inc. (CMI), Wenatchee, WA. "Domestic production out of the Northwest this season will be about 45,000 to 50,000 cartons. Over the next five years, we

expect new plantings to come into bearing and for the domestic crop to increase to the 300,000 carton level." Average Ambrosia sizes are 72s and 88s. Availability is mid-October until January.

**Cripps Red:** Also sold as Sundowner, this Australian-bred variety is a cross between a Golden Delicious and Lady Williams. Its red peel with white, crisp, juicy, sweet flesh is akin to Cripps Pink or Pink Lady. "It's excellent for baking or eating out of hand," says Andy Tudor, director of sales, L&M Northwest, Selah, WA. "We'll have 15,000 cases available this season."

**Fortune:** In 1995, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, introduced this variety, which is a cross between Schoharie Spy and Empire. It has a sweet flavor, keeps well through the distribution system and has peak sizes as large as 27s, according to Lee Peters, vice president of sales and marketing, Fowler Bros., Inc., Wolcott, NY. "We expect to have 50,000 to 75,000 cartons this year. The crop starts harvest the third week of October."

**Kiku Fuji:** This ruby-red striped apple with firm, juicy, sweet flesh has 120 percent

of the sugar content of a traditional Fuji apple, says Mast. "We plan to start shipping the Kiku Fiji in the fall of 2008 and will market it as either the Kiku or Kiku Fuji."

**Piñata:** A trademarked variety of Stemilt Growers, Wenatchee, WA, the German-bred Piñata is a cross between Golden Delicious and Clivia, the latter a cross between Cox's Orange Pippin and Duchess of Oldenburg. "The Piñata peaks at 80s and 88s and we anticipate a volume of about 70,000 cartons this season," says marketing director Roger Pepperl. The Piñata has a stripy red color with an orange background and sweet tart flavor. Stemilt offers POS materials to introduce the variety. "We harvest in October and put the apple in storage for 30 days to mellow and cure. Then, we launch it just after the first of the year."

**Zestar:** Bred at the University of Minnesota, Zestar is an early season apple that starts harvest in August. It is bright red with a greenish yellow coloring, medium sized and has a crisp, white flesh that is very juicy and spicy sweet. "We'll have about 25,000 to 40,000 cartons this year," says Peters. **pb**

'something new' and use this strategy to differentiate your department."

## 8. BUILD APPETIZING DISPLAYS

On average, says Newell's Wright, "Top corporate chains have anywhere from 30- to 50-feet of display for conventional and another 20-feet of display for organic apples. In the fall, placement of the display is first and foremost in the department. Many stores will include POS signage. Key corporate accounts make their own and include information such as the name of the variety, a picture, attributes, nutrition facts and usage tips. Many other retailers use POS from state commissions or individual vendors in Washington state."

Varieties should be displayed in color-coordinated sections, recommends Oppenheimer's Nelley, "and each should be well marked as to what it is, especially if the variety is new to the market."

"Consider using pears to create color and shape breaks within an apple display, especially among bi-colored varieties. We test marketed this concept last year and found sales of both apples and pears increased,"

adds Stemilt's Pepperl.

Dovex's Loudon favors end-cap and waterfall displays because they "make an eye-catching presentation."

Bin sales are popular during the fall. Fowler Farms introduced a high-graphic, 8-panel, half-size 17½-inch deep bin with a full-pallet footprint. When filled with bulk apples, "It's ready to just pull off the cover and sell," says Peters.

Sages Sinks agrees. "Retailers need to concentrate on making displays nice by using bins or nice in-store signage."

NYAA introduced colorful, new bin wrap depicting varieties of apples grown in the state. It can also be used to skirt a table or as display wallpaper. The wrap measures 30 inches high by 13 feet long, says McClurg.

Shippers are an excellent way to introduce new apple varieties, says CMI's Mast. "Our stand-alone shipper for Ambrosia helps it stand out in a sea of other apples. The shipper also helps manage shelf space."

## 9. ADVERTISE AND PROMOTE

Apples are strong contributors to produce department sales on a year-round

basis. According to the Perishables Group, contribution is highest in Q4, at 7.8 percent in 2006. Category contribution was lowest in Q3 2006 at 5.1 percent. "The difference between summer and fall is huge. Some categories in the produce department don't even generate this amount," notes Lutz.

"Some of our retailers advertise first-of-the-season availability, others run more conventional price-driven ads and still others do a combinations like run ads for bag and bulk or multiple varieties at once," relates Wright. "Either way, in the fall ads are typically twice per month. In the summer, retailers tend to average one apple ad per month."

One of the best ways to introduce a new variety is via ad, says Pepperl. "As in restaurants, you have your normal menu offerings and specials. Let consumers know about your specials with a 'try me' ad or POS sign."

NYAA has introduced its New York Apple Ad Planner. "This tool gives retail buyers a road map of availability dates for 25 to 30 varieties from August to June and suggests specific ways to promote apples on a weekly basis based on season and seasonal holidays," McClurg says. "It's designed to spark ideas and generate incremental sales." **pb**



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Reader Service # 205

# Sweet Potatoes Are Growing In Popularity

*Retailers can cash in on consumer demand for this healthful, versatile vegetable.*

BY HEATHER CROW

**T**he sweet potato, — versatile enough to be used in both sweet and savory dishes — is becoming a favorite American vegetable. Consumers use sweet potatoes in everything from biscuits to casseroles to pies; they can be fried, baked, boiled, sautéed and steamed. Often called yams, the sweet potato is a member of the morning glory family; true yams are starchy tubers not commercially grown in the United States.

In 2005, sweet potatoes accounted for more than \$300 million in cash receipts, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Agricultural Statistics Service.

Diets such as Sugar Busters, Atkins and other low-carbohydrate regimens tout the sweet potato as healthful. "Many local restaurants and chains have started serving sweet potatoes as an alternative to white potatoes with steak or pork," says Benny Graves, executive secretary for the Mississippi Sweet Potato Council (MSPC), Mississippi State, MS. "People are starting to throw one on the grill with a steak."

According to George Wooten, president and owner of Wayne E. Bailey Produce Company, Chadbourn, NC, one of the sweet potato's big draws is that it does not traditionally require salt, margarine or sour cream. "It's a good substitute for white potatoes. You may want to put brown sugar or cinnamon on sweet potatoes to spice them up, but they are flavorful enough as is."

Awareness from retail and foodservice has boosted consumption in recent years, says Steve Phipps, principal owner and director of sales and marketing for Market Fresh Produce, LLC, Springfield, MO. "It's hard to believe that consumer use of some-



**Sweet potatoes are a healthful year-round option for health-conscious consumers.**

thing with that much flavor has been limited to Easter, Thanksgiving and other holidays," he says. "It's a very healthy vegetable, and I think more people are realizing that."

Wooten agrees, saying, "The multiple health benefits of sweet potatoes have stirred consumers' interest, but it's really the flavor that continues to hold their interest and impact sales."

This increase in demand is a boon for producers and retailers. "So many good strides have been made in recent years, demand is exceeding supply," says Frank Mesa, sales manager for Garcia Farms Produce, Livingston, CA. With domestic producers able to supply local consumers with high-quality product, retailers have an opportunity to capitalize on the combination of increasing demand and good shelf life.

## HEALTH ATTRIBUTES

Why is the demand for sweet potatoes

becoming so great? One reason is increased interest in healthful living through nutrition. During the past few years, the media have highlighted numerous studies showing the health benefits of vegetables, such as prevention of cancer, Alzheimer's disease and heart disease. The 5-A-Day campaign from the Produce for Better Health Foundation (PBH), Wilmington, DE, which recently gave way to *Fruits & Veggies — More Matters*, constantly and consistently reminded Americans of the health benefits of eating vegetables. Plus, as Winifred Wood, proprietor for J. Roland Wood Farms, Benson, NC, points out, "It's just really a delicious vegetable!"

"Baby boomers are taking better care of themselves, and that often includes adding sweet potatoes to their diet," adds Graves. "While eating them at the holidays is great, sweet potatoes are available year-round, even in the summer."

Debbie Lee, co-owner of Lee Farms, Four

# Marketing Trends

**T**he advent of convenience packaging is the most recent — and most visible — trend to affect sweet potatoes. "Over the last couple of years, retailers have done an excellent job merchandising, especially with convenience items and consumer packs," says Frank Mesa, sales manager, Garcia Farms Produce, Livingston, CA.

"We are seeing more and more [convenience packaging]," agrees Sue Langdon, executive director, North Carolina Sweet Potato Commission, Smithfield, NC, "especially for urban dwellers, who may have less storage space, so they buy what they need. I see this category as increasing. Another part of this category is pre-cut potatoes. I believe the trend of pre-cut is a bit ahead of its time. However, we are a convenience-driven society, and this will help preparation time."

George Wooten, president, Wayne E. Bailey Produce Company, Chadbourn, NC, echoes this assessment. "It can be a time-consuming process to peel and dice sweet potatoes," he says. "Offering pre-cut items not only gives the consumer 100 percent usable product, but it also brings added value to the consumer and the retailer."

Offering a variety of options, such as 4- to 6-ounce products with quick baking times, is one of the best ways to boost sales, says Steve

Phipps, principal owner and director of sales and marketing, Market Fresh Produce, LLC, Springfield, MO. "Some of the smaller sizes can be put in the microwave and ready to eat at work in just four minutes. That's perfect for someone who doesn't want the 20-ounce size."

Mesa stresses the aesthetics of the sweet potato. "The ideal climate and soil in California, where Garcia Farms is located, causes the same varieties grown in North Carolina to look different. It is smoother skinned." He says California retailers appreciate this because aesthetics are more important in California than on the East Coast where consumers are more accustomed to rougher-skinned sweet potatoes.

As sweet potatoes continue to transform from holiday comfort food to healthful year-round vegetable, consumer demand will continue to increase. Baby boomers and younger generations increasingly recognize the impact of dietary choices and are consciously choosing to eat healthful foods. Sweet potatoes fill the bill and are turning up grilled, on skewers, in breads, salads, soups and desserts across the country.

**pb**

Oaks, NC, agrees, "Consumers are more health conscious and have more health concerns. Sweet potatoes work well for diets, such as Weight Watchers and for diabetics."

Sweet potatoes have received an abundance of favorable attention. The Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI), Washington, D.C., recently named the sweet potato

to the No. 1 super food for better health and the top vegetable on its list of most healthful foods.

The American Cancer Society, based in Atlanta, GA, teamed up with the North Carolina Sweet Potato Commission (NCSPC), Smithfield, NC, to produce a brochure with health and nutritional information and a

variety of recipes — ranging from side dishes to desserts — plus cooking tips.

## MERCHANDISING CONSIDERATIONS

How and where sweet potatoes are merchandised within the produce department has an impact on sales. While most produce

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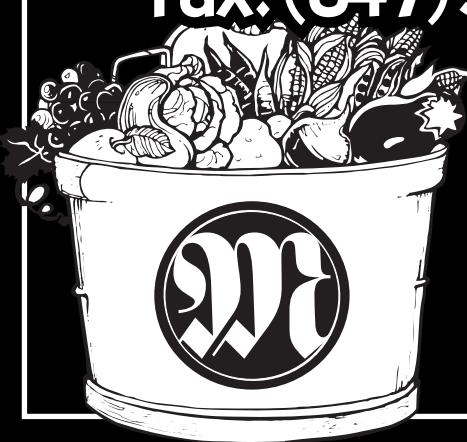
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items are highly perishable, the sweet potato has the benefit of a bit longer shelf life.

"Turnover is important with a strong shelf life," Garcia Farms' Mesa explains. "While the shelf life decreases during the summer, sweet potatoes still have a shelf life of up to three weeks, even in June, as long as they are kept in a controlled area to maintain the integrity. The sweet potato becomes sweeter as it stores and gets sweetest after curing for up to three to four months."

Few other vegetables have that benefit.

In fact, the MSPC reports sweet potatoes can be stored up to 13 months in controlled conditions. That, of course, means less shrink.

Retailers should focus on the following concepts to increase sales of sweet potatoes and take advantage of a growing demand for this low maintenance product:

**Placement and size of displays.** "The No. 1 thing is to make the display prominent. Islands work well," advises Sue Langdon, NCSPC executive director.

MSPC's Graves agrees, "When I walk into

the produce department, bulk or large displays catch my eye. Two cartons of sweet potatoes displayed are not too impressive. Bulk displays work well."

**Maintain the display.** Keeping displays properly maintained is another important aspect of successful displays. "Rotating and replenishment is very important, particularly during peak traffic times — it is directly related to increasing sales," Graves points out.

**Handle with care.** Most growers believe retailers handle the product well. "I think most retailers do a good job with care," says Winifred Wood, proprietor, J. Roland Wood Farms, Benson, NC. She suggests storing sweet potatoes between 55° and 60° F, handling them with care and keeping them in a cool, dark place.

**Point-Of-Sale Materials.** Four Oaks's Lee believes, "Retailers need the right tools — information with displays that attract customers year-round. The main thing is to have nutritional information and recipes to go with the sweet potatoes."

Langdon recommends "recipes, tear-off pads, and brochures with information on ways to choose and use." When creating signage, color is key. "Because sweet potatoes are naturally a dull color, you must make them stand out with eye catching materials and colorful displays," she adds

"POS materials such as high graphics, recipes and nutritional information can help sweet potatoes stand out, which is difficult to do with so many items in the store," according to Mesa.

**Cross-Merchandise.** While many retailers do this during holiday periods, cross-merchandising throughout the year can provide a non-holiday boost in sales. "While many think of the sweet potato as eaten with cinnamon and butter, try non-traditional ideas, especially savory versus sweet," Langdon suggests. "For example, sweet potatoes pair well with rosemary, curry, sour cream, cheese and dried fruit, such as dried cranberries, raisins and dried fruit mixes. Make the display creative and interesting with information on how to prepare."

**Utilize available marketing programs.** State sweet potato organizations, and several prominent growers offer marketing programs ranging from Web-based marketing materials to POS items such as brochures, signage artwork and tear-off recipes. NCSPC will host a national retail contest in February 2008. Details will be announced on the commission's Web site in October. MSPC takes part in an annual Sweet Potato Festival, and growers Lee Farms will host in-store demonstrations utilizing sweet potatoes in recipes.

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# The Impact Of Florida Produce

*Marketing and promotion helps Florida create a strong presence nationwide.*

BY MAURCIA DELEAN HOUCK

## **The demand for Florida-grown fruits and vegetables is tremendous.**

With nearly \$87 billion in projected sales for the 2007 growing season — a \$394 million increase over last year — Florida continues to be a major player in the nation's agricultural production.

Why such an increase in demand for the state's produce? Interest stems, at least in part, from a savvy marketing campaign, unleashed in 2003 by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS), Tallahassee, FL, designed to position Florida growers as the nation's leading agricultural suppliers.

While Florida citrus growers are longtime industry leaders, the push to promote the state's other fruit and vegetable commodities has helped boost consumer and retailer awareness about the quality and availability of Florida produce. The state's most popular commodities include tomatoes, celery, avocados, potatoes, strawberries, cabbage, blueberries, sweet corn and tangerines.

"Florida is always going to be a player in the fresh-produce arena," says Jamie Weisinger, direc-

tor of produce procurement for Six L's Packing Company, an Immokalee, FL-based supplier that specializes in Florida-grown tomatoes. "Whether you live in Florida or the Midwest, people are always going to associate Florida with good produce and sunshine. A lot of people grew up drinking Florida orange juice or eating Florida tomatoes, and retail chains are always going to try to capture that image or notion to bring people into their stores."

Daniel Whittles, director of marketing, Rosemont Farms Corp., Boca Raton, FL, agrees. "Depending on the geography of the consumer, Florida fruits and vegetables can be a psychological reminder of summer as an uplifting benefit besides the obvious health benefits."

Good soil, great temperatures, hot sun and a long growing season are factors that attract top growers to the state, notes Scott Seddon, marketing director of Pero Farms, Delray Beach, FL. "All of these things together create a recipe for success — no matter what you're offering the consumer."

Sue Harrell, director of marketing for the Florida Strawberry Growers Association, Inc., (FSGA) Plant City, FL, credits Florida's warm climate for the ideal growing conditions that allow producers to offer quality produce during the fall and winter. "When the weather's gloomy throughout the rest of the country, we're able to offer something sweet, bright and delicious during the winter months," Harrell says.

Grown on 8,000 acres throughout the state, Florida strawberries boast a growing season that runs through March. "Our buyers know we have a consistent supply of quality produce," she adds. "Plus, we're always offering new varieties."

Brian Rayfield, vice president of sales and marketing for J & J Produce, Inc., Loxahatchee, FL, echoes this assessment. "Florida offers high-quality products and a long growing season from the middle of October through next May."

Sustainability and viability are factors that make Florida produce so appealing. Weisinger says the land south of Lake Okeechobee is one of the few areas in the country that does not experience freezing conditions. "We receive threats sometimes between December through the end of January, but they're minimal. The land is very viable this time of year."



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Florida is the only state with a full-blown fresh produce production area during the fall and winter season, according to Whit-tles. "As more and more production moves offshore or to other countries of origin, we can feel national pride in supporting Florida-grown produce and experience the health, freshness and taste benefits at the same time."

Variety is another important benefit Florida producers offer consumers. "There are literally dozens of fresh fruit and vegetables available from Florida in the categories of dry vegetables, wet vegetables, citrus fruit, tropical fruit and potatoes," he adds. "Additionally, there continues to be strong growth in the value-added category, giving consumers even more choices and creating time savings and preparation flexibility."

#### FDACS PROMOTIONAL BLITZ

Understanding the importance of positioning Florida's growers as a leader in the agricultural industry nationwide, FDACS unleashed a unique marketing campaign backed by Florida Agriculture Commissioner Charles Bronson. Aimed at boosting the state's agriculture image and helping consumers more easily identify Florida-grown

produce, the *Fresh From Florida* promotional efforts helped increase last year's Florida produce sales by nearly \$400 million.

Retailers can expect similar sales increases this year as the program expands to nearly 8,000 retail stores in 34 of the nation's most popular retail chains across 43 states and the District of Columbia. Florida-grown produce sales are also expected to increase in the Canadian provinces of Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island; as well as in the Caribbean and Central America. Dan Sleep, FDACS supervisor and senior analyst for the division of marketing,

says many of the agency's retail partners have eagerly signed on for another year

## Most Popular Florida Commodities For The Fall

According to statistics gathered by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Tallahassee, FL, and the Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association, Orlando, FL, Florida's most popular fruits and vegetables from its fall growing season (in alphabetical order) include:

- \* Avocados
- \* Lettuce
- \* Cabbage
- \* Oranges
- \* Carambola
- \* Potatoes
- \* Carrots
- \* Radishes
- \* Cauliflower
- \* Snap peas
- \* Celery
- \* Squash
- \* Chinese cabbage
- \* Strawberries
- \* Cucumbers
- \* Sweet corn
- \* Eggplant
- \* Tangerines
- \* Grapefruit
- \* Tomatoes
- \* Green beans
- \* Watermelon
- \* Green peppers

with the campaign after seeing their sales increase.





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Timed to coincide with Florida's important winter-spring harvest, which runs from November to June, the *Fresh From Florida* promotional program is designed to link Florida agricultural producers, grocery retailers and consumers to create demand. Focused on partnering with grocery chains, *Fresh From Florida* uses three major marketing programs: Global Grid, Florida Farmer's Express and the Florida Watermelon Campaign. Each program offers multifaceted marketing promotions that best suit geographic area and customer base.

"Consistently communicating a unified message about the benefits of fresh Florida produce is a win-win for producers, retailers and ultimately the consumer," says Whittles of Rosemont Farms, a participant in the *Fresh From Florida* campaign. "Driving a balanced message about health benefits along with freshness, taste and quality is necessary to create critical mass with these programs."

The *Fresh From Florida* programs allow retailers to increase sales by using the *Fresh From Florida* logo in themed newspaper ads and circulars and on POS materials. By increasing the size of their displays to accommodate more of the product, retailers ultimately sell more, Sleep says.



Photo courtesy of Brooks Tropical

#### Florida avocados are larger than Hass avocados and contain less fat.

This creates a 3-way support system that includes the state's producers, grocery retailers and consumers, Sleep explains. This allows Florida producers to plant, harvest and ship additional product to meet anticipated increased demand. Likewise, it allows retail buyers to boost corporate orders of Florida products and 'front load' the shipments to handle a rise in sales. Lastly, the linkage allows industry leaders to target customers with *Fresh From Florida* promotional

themes through media advertising.

The success of the three promotional programs depends on personal visits and follow-ups by the department's marketing staff with corporate buyers and store personnel, Sleep adds.

For example, the Global Grid campaign yielded \$324.7 million in retail sales this year alone, followed by the Farmers Express Campaign at \$41.1 million and the Florida Watermelon Campaign at \$28.6 million, according to the FDACS.

Celebrating its 25th anniversary, FSGA is planning similar efforts to promote Florida-grown strawberries. "Our goal is create awareness about the winter strawberries grown in Florida," says Harrell. "We want to target national, regional and local audiences through television and newspaper ads."

FSGA continues to work with the University of Florida, Gainesville, FL, to explore new research and develop new varieties, she adds.

#### GROWERS TAKE THE LEAD

To promote their products directly to retailers, many Florida growers and produce packagers are taking the lead in developing their own independent marketing strategies. This individual support is designed to meet

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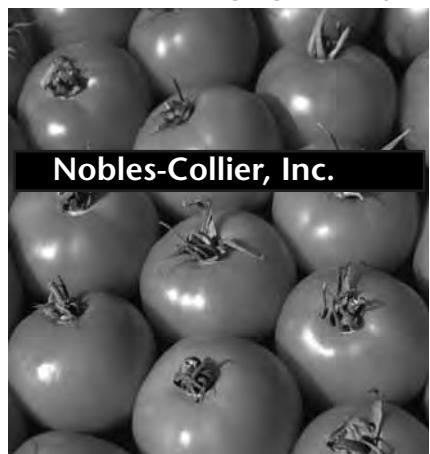
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Reader Service # 96

each retailer's unique needs and interests.

For instance, L&M Companies, Inc., headquartered in Raleigh, NC, but with extensive growing operation in Florida, emphasizes offering regional support to its retailers. "It's very difficult to offer over-reaching opportunities in our promotional efforts and still be specific to our retailers' sales needs," explains marketing director Lee Anne Oxford. "Each of our retailers has different regional and ethnic marketing needs, so we try and pack a lot of different kinds of produce parcels together that best tailor to their region and demographics.

This allows us to better meet their customers' individual needs."

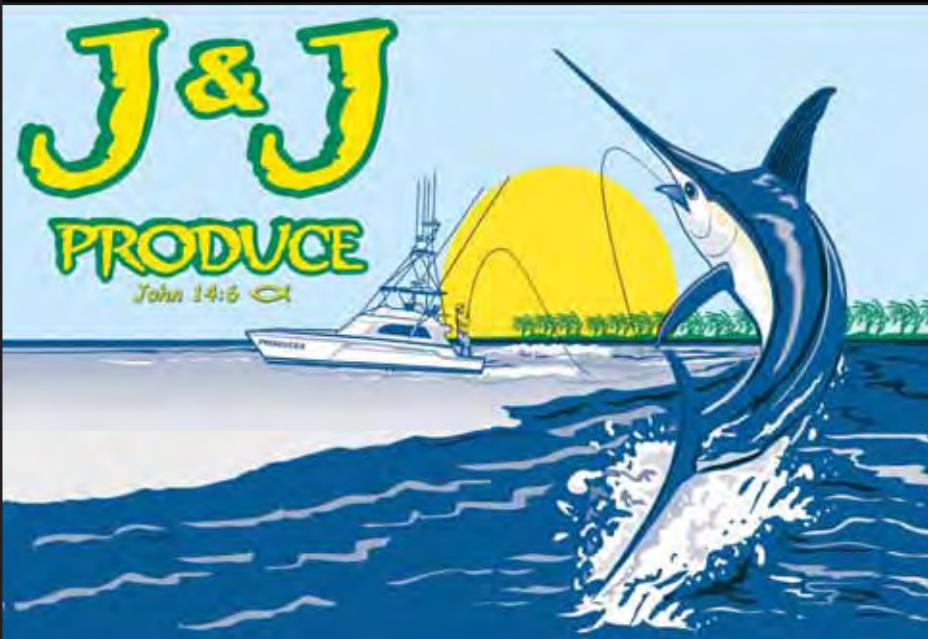
An area with a high Asian demographic, for example, will need the types of fresh fruits and vegetables particular to a Korean, Chinese, Japanese, Thai, etc., diet, as well as the produce these groups are accustomed to eating in relation to specific holidays; other areas may need sales and promotions targeting a totally different customer base.

Brad Cook, marketing manager for A. Duda & Sons, Inc., Oviedo, FL, agrees, saying most of Duda's retailer-based marketing and promotional activities are designed on a

case-by-case basis. "We have nothing large scale planned at the time," he says. "We usually like to work with retailers to offer a more customized approach to cross-promotion that can work with their own sets, refrigeration capability and store layout. We believe flexibility and individualized attention are the keys to higher sales."

One nationwide effort the company is trying to institute at all its retailers is placing all celery products in a single display unit rather than scattering them throughout the produce department, Cook says. "In the past, retailers have kept celery stalks in one area, celery hearts in another and packaged snack sticks in a third in an attempt to grab the customer's attention in several different areas," he explains. "Our consumer research has found, however, that when you bring all of our celery products together into one sin-

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To promote their products directly to retailers, many Florida growers and produce packagers are taking the lead in developing their own independent marketing strategies.

gle display unit, sales actually increase as customers think of ways to use each of our products when they see them all together."

This year, Six L's teamed up with Imagination Farms, Indianapolis, IN, to package tomatoes and watermelon under the Disney Garden brand. Clamshell packaging for Florida-grown grape tomatoes will feature characters from the Disney film *The Incredibles*. "We've created a lot of displays, too, to help retailers push Florida produce," Weisinger says. "They like displays with a lot of color and eye-catching things so they can really go after the customers."

Mary Ostlund, marketing director at Brooks Tropicals, Homestead, FL, says it's important to show consumers what they can do with Florida-grown products. For example, Florida avocado sales rise in accordance



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# Special Promotional Activities

In response to the success of the *Fresh from Florida* marketing strategy undertaken by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS), Tallahassee, FL, many of the industry's other promotional advocacy groups and promotional organizations are following suit in their own efforts to promote Florida's fruits and vegetables.

## Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association (FFVA), Orlando, FL

Although the organization has no major programs slated for the fall, it continues to analyze buying trends that can help both growers and retailers better meet consumers' needs and expectations. "Right now we are seeing a continuing trend in two areas — the growth of the ethnic market and value-added packaging," says marketing director Lisa Lockridge. By helping industry leaders better understand the growth in these areas and the unique opportunities they present to retailers, FFVA believes it can help producers offer newer items that are sure to be crowd pleasers, thus increasing total industry sales.

## The Florida Tomato Commission (FTC), Maitland, FL

With more than 1.2 million pounds of Florida tomatoes harvested and shipped every year, FTC has positioned itself as a national leader in the tomato industry. In an attempt to boost the popularity of the Florida tomato even further, it plans to kick off an aggressive 2-year retail promotional program this fall. Program efforts include teaming up with the Food Network and Borders Bookstores to offer produce consumers savings on Food Network cookbooks with the purchase of Florida tomatoes. "This is an exciting new program that we are thrilled to be a part of," says Samantha Winters, director of marketing. FTC officials hope their efforts will encourage consumers to reach for Florida tomatoes when they shop for produce.

## Fresh Supersweet Corn Council, Orlando, FL

It can be a struggle promoting a generally off-season product, such as fresh corn, during the winter months when the majority of the United States isn't thinking about this traditionally summer commodity, says Jason Stemm, account supervisor. That is why the Fresh Supersweet Corn Council has channeled its efforts into showcasing ways consumers can use and enjoy fresh corn from Florida during fall and winter.

"It's our job to get people to start thinking about corn in a new way during these months," Stemm says. "Maybe as an easy tailgating food item since it cooks so well on the grill or as part of a fresh stew during colder months. We have been very successful in the past offering our retailers promotional programs designed to showcase ways in which consumers can use fresh corn at mealtime with tear-off recipe leaflets located in the produce department of their favorite grocery store. These easy recipe cards offer quick, simple and unique ways to cook corn, including the ever-popular skillet method as well as roasting and microwaving tips."

Another way the Council fosters interest in fresh corn during the off-season is in its packaging. While consumers may prefer large drop bins during peak seasonal times when they consider the product to be freshest, they prefer more enticing and "pretty" packaging during the winter because it allows them to see the beauty and freshness of the product. "Cross-merchandising is also important," Stemm adds. "When we can promote corn with other more seasonal accepted items, sales are apt to be higher."

The key to higher corn sales in fall and winter is helping the consumer realize that Florida-grown corn is fresh and delicious. "Presentation in your displays is crucial," Stemm continues. "Once consumers try it, they realize how sweet and delicious Florida corn is anytime of the year."

grams and coupon savings, new and innovative ways to package Florida-grown products are also getting a lot of attention.

"Today's consumer is looking for quick and convenient," Duda's Cook notes. "Right now, our big push is on our packaged corn, which features a film lid that allows the consumer to put it in the microwave for three minutes and enjoy four ears of perfectly steamed corn that tastes like it had been boiled in the traditional way that takes much longer."

Pero's Seddon agrees and adds packaging that addresses nutritional benefits is important when promoting Florida commodities. "People are more health conscious these days and are looking for products that offer them the health benefits they seek but are still of good quality and delicious to eat," he says. "Those who understand how to bring these health benefits to the buyer with their packaging and promotion efforts will discover wonderful sales benefits."

At Fort Pierce, FL-based DNE World Fruit Sales, the emphasis is smaller packaging. "Our smaller 3-pound grapefruit and tangerine bag has become very popular in recent years due to smaller families and households," says marketing promotions manager Kathy Hearl. "The smaller packaging also hits a good price point and is a great value for customers."

## SAFETY AND QUALITY

The issues of quality and safety have always been paramount to Florida growers. The key to expanding the state's produce market is to continue that penchant for quality and safety in all of its produce commodities.

Florida has traditionally offered the highest quality citrus in the nation, adds Hearl. "Consumers embrace the fresh delicious taste of Florida citrus."

"We spend a lot of our time and effort bringing retailers the highest quality product we can," Cook says.

Safety has become the highest priority for Florida growers and packagers. As the entire industry continues to make strides to combat the negative publicity surrounding recent salmonella and *E. coli* outbreaks linked to fresh produce harvested and packaged in other parts of the country, Florida's produce industry has joined in an effort to ensure all of its fresh and packaged fruits and vegetables are as safe as possible.

"At Duda we are trying to offer a national safety program to retailers all across the country so they can feel confident the products they are buying are as safe as they can possibly be," Cook explains.

According to J & J's Rayfield, "Florida is

to retailers' ability to show consumers more ways to use this unique product. "When most people think of avocados, they think of guacamole," Ostlund says, "but there are so many more ways to use avocados. That's why we now offer Chef's Corner, a unique interactive Web site that offers foodservice

users as well as the general consumer a variety of chef-quality recipes to try."

## PACKAGING TRENDS

Beyond widespread marketing and promotional campaigns that include national media exposure, specialized giveaway pro-



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Standard	1 Ticket	\$1,000



Date: Thursday, November 29th, 2007

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Place: Esplendor Resort



Photo courtesy of A. Duda & Sons, Inc.

**Value-added packaging makes Florida-grown produce even more appealing.**

doing everything it can to promote and ensure food safety. It's important to assure retailers that Florida produce is safe."

Pero's Seddon agrees safety has become one of the state's biggest concerns. "We are looking more and more toward packaging our products in specially designed food-safety packs to give consumers the confidence they are buying and using the freshest and safest product available."

Lisa Lockridge, director of public affairs for the Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association (FFVA), Orlando, FL, agrees. "Today's more healthful lifestyle and eating habits have consumers looking for high-quality, great-tasting fruits and vegetables year-round," she says. This leaves Florida in a unique position to supply the nation's retailers with the quality, great taste and cost-effective produce they want and need.

## FREIGHT SAVINGS

Depending on a chain's location, lower freight costs can be a major incentive for retailers to consider when purchasing Florida produce. "People most desire homegrown products," stresses L&M's Oxford. They tend to choose domestic product over imports, especially if the right price point is reached.

"The freight savings of buying Florida produce can be huge," stresses Duda's Cook, "and that savings can be passed directly on to consumers, making our produce the most economical around, especially for East Coast buyers."

FSGA's Harrell agrees, noting, "For the Northeast market, it can take up to four days to ship produce from California. But in Florida, we can pick fruit one day and have it shipped that same day or the next."

With so many different benefits encouraging retailers to stock their shelves with Florida produce, it's no wonder the state's agricultural industry continues to boom. The key to maintaining these high sales figures, according to FDACS, is continuing to offer the nation the best quality, safest and most economical products that Florida has to offer.



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Reader Service #210

Reader Service #161

# RED RIVER VALLEY POTATOES



A

*new promotional campaign coupled with a good growing season augur well for the region.*

BY SANDY LINDBLAD LEE

**T**he widely held belief that only russet-type varieties should be used for baking is a myth. Those who bake red potatoes grown in the Red River Valley — the Red River is the border between North Dakota and Minnesota — discover the fallacy of that notion.

That's one of the primary messages the Northern Plains Potato Growers Association (NPPGA), East Grand Forks, MN, is trying to deliver this year through its marketing program to help increase consumption of red potatoes from the Red River Valley. *Bake a Red River Valley Red...and taste the difference!* That is the tagline from its advertising campaign, which is part of the strategy to help dissuade consumers of the mistaken belief that only russets are good baking potatoes.

According to Ted Kreis, NPPGA marketing director, "Point-of-sale materials are available emphasizing this idea, and we are encouraging sampling in stores so customers can find out for themselves that Red River Valley potatoes provide the best flavor for baking."

In general, the region's shippers generally set up their own promotions at retail, but Kreis says NPPGA can provide additional assistance and guidance as requested. "The best thing we can do for our shippers is to help them get the best market returns," he emphasizes. "We want to do things that are meaningful or significant to our growers."

Steve Tweten, sales manager for Buxton, ND-based NoKota

Packers Inc., which packed 547,000 hundredweight of red potatoes last season, supports the new baked potato push. "We are a niche product. Our potatoes stay red until the end. Their red skins improve the looks of popular, trendy menu items like garlic mashed potatoes. Now, we say, 'Hey, you can also bake a red potato'."

"I encourage people to try using reds with any kind of cooking or baking," adds Paul Dolan, manager of Associated Potato Growers Inc. (APGI), Grand Forks, MN. "Reds from the valley have especially good flavor when baked."

APGI is recognized as the largest shipper of red potatoes in the Valley. The cooperative expects to ship in excess of 1 million hundredweight this season.

"One of the reasons our potatoes have better flavor is because they are non-irrigated," notes Randy Boushey, salesman for A & L Potato Company, East Grand Forks, MN. "Our non-irrigated reds have higher solids than irrigated, so they are creamier and more full-flavored."

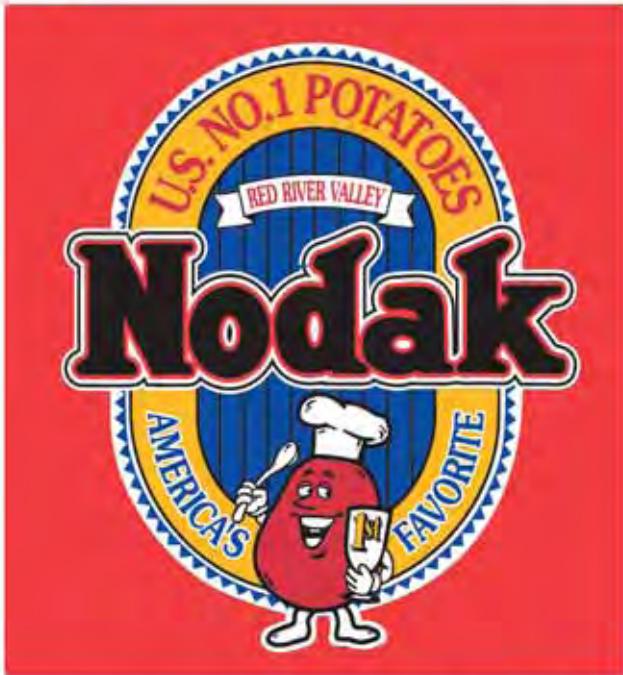
"When you have a good-tasting potato to begin with, you don't need as much enhancement," Boushey continues. "Because of that, not as many calories are added, since you don't need to add as much butter or sour cream to improve the great taste that's already built in."

Boushey also points to the built-in advantages of the high-color reds produced in the Red River Valley. "Since looks are 80 percent of purchase, it's hard to ignore how good our potatoes look in retail

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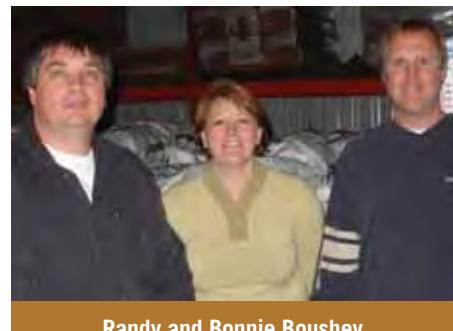
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Andy and Dave Moquist at O.C. Schulz



NoKota Packers staff. Back row (l to r) Tim Lee, Steve Tweten, and Ron Gjelsness. Front Row: Carissa Olsen, Marilyn Asheim, and Roxanne Reed



Randy and Bonnie Boushey, and Mike Olson at A & L Potato

displays. Our foodservice marketability is also enhanced by our potatoes' deep red color."

Tri-Campbell Farms, Grafton, ND, has taken the notion of baking reds one step further. One of its packaging options is individually shrink-wrapped microwavable red bakers. "A baked red potato is hard to beat," says Tom Campbell, partner.

#### MORE PROMOTIONS

"We want to do things that are meaningful and significant to our growers," says NPPGA's Kreis. "We can provide storage and handling information to both retail and foodservice." Kreis also helps local growers get their product into local stores and regional grocery chains.

A number of public appearances by the Healthy Mr. Potato Head mascot have taken place to draw attention to Red River Valley potatoes. The mascot costume is made available to all growing regions by the United States Potato Board in Denver.

Healthy Mr. Potato Head made an appearance at a minor league RedHawks baseball game in Fargo, ND. The mascot, who has special characteristics that emphasize potato health benefits, also attended the Potato Bowl Parade held in conjunction with the University of North Dakota football game in Grand Forks. The parade is one of several activities, including the annual French Fry Feed, NPPGA was involved with during the Potato Bowl festivities.

NPPGA, in conjunction with the USPB,

presented a school assembly last spring starring Healthy Mr. Potato Head. The production was enjoyed by 566 kids from eight different elementary schools in the Grafton, ND, region. "This was a big event for the local potato industry," Kreis says, "with all those future consumers hearing the potato nutrition message and bringing it home to mom and dad."

NPPGA exhibits each year at the annual Newark, DE-based Produce Marketing Association (PMA) Fresh Summit convention. NPPGA also exhibits at the Washington, D.C.-based National Restaurant Association Show in Chicago each May.

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Automated bagger bags Red River Valley Reds



Healthy Mr. Potato Head and NPPGA's Ted Kreis make the rounds at the Potato Bowl French Fry Feed



Red River Valley baked red potatoes were sampled at PMA.

services to retailers who request them.

Tri-Campbell has been involved in category management for several years, Campbell notes. "Because of the wide range of potato products and packaging we offer, we're category potato managers for some chains." The company also has operations in northern Florida and Clovis, NM, and handles potatoes on a year-round basis. As one of the few area shippers that offer organic potatoes, Tri-Campbell packs red,

yellow, and russet organic potatoes under its Poplar Grove label.

"Our customers are going to smaller and smaller packs," he explains. "Two things really taking off for us are our 2-pound creamer pack and our Sunlite potato. Sun-

lites have 25 percent fewer calories and 30 percent fewer carbs than the average potato." The white potato variety, first developed in Florida, provides added desirability to dieters in addition to its nutritional content.

"We are one of the very few companies that is vertically integrated, from dirt to retail," says Campbell. "We own the product. We even go one step beyond the commercial grower since we also have our own seed farm, and we're working with plant breeders for new varieties for red and yellow flesh potatoes," he adds.

Although APGI remains the largest shipper of red potatoes in the valley, Paul Dolan says APGI does not participate in category management directly. "For us to be category managers would not be logical — red potatoes are only 8 percent of the total market. We are not in the business to go out and buy russets to help supply customers. We are better suited to do what we do best, do a good job and work with people who specialize in category management."

#### PRIVATE LABELING

Retailers are increasingly seeking those who provide private labeling services. "Although it's cyclical, private labeling is big right now," emphasizes NoKota's Tweten. The majority of the private-label volume

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Reader Service # 80

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For more information contact Claudia Wenzing @ (302) 235-2329, ext. 320 or [cwenzing@pbhfoundation.org](mailto:cwenzing@pbhfoundation.org)

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## Mixed Feeling About United Cooperative

**W**ith its primary goal of addressing North America's overproduction problems, the United Potato Growers of America (UPGA), based in Salt Lake City, UT, is in its fourth year of operation. Neither the Northern Plains Potato Growers Association (NPPGA), East Grand Forks, MN, nor any individual shippers in the Red River Valley have yet to join UPGA, and opinions about the potential benefits of membership remain mixed.

According to NPPGA president Duane Maatz, a portion of the group remains "in negotiations on becoming members of United. However, because 96 percent of the Red River Valley's fresh potato production is in reds, the area enjoys a niche market." The general feeling is that the major problem with overproduction centers on russet potato plantings.

NPPGA has its own co-op, Minn-Dak Potato Growers Bargaining Cooperative, formed originally to allow open price negotiations. It is used to negotiate contracts involving french fries. "A lot of good communication can cause great results," stresses Maatz.

Steve Tweten, sales manager, NoKota Packers Inc., Buxton, ND, believes, "Some good things are coming out of United. It could make us much better marketers. [It] has caused more unity in the industry. If there were more unity in the Red River Valley as well, that would be great.

"We have niche product here [red potatoes]. We also don't have to beat ourselves up as often," he adds.

"What United is trying to accomplish is good, but it's mostly for the russet industry," stresses Paul Dolan, manager of Associated Potato Growers Inc., Grand Forks, ND. "One thing unique to us is that

NoKota packs is in the 5-pound poly size.

"We continue to do more private labeling every year," says APGI's Dolan, who estimates it now comprises about 50 percent of the total red potato volume the cooperative packs from its three locations. "We do mostly the 5-pound poly and the 3-pound B-Size."

A & L's Boushey agrees private labeling is an ongoing trend. "We're now packing about 85 percent of our volume in private labels," he estimates.

O.C. Schulz & Sons Inc., based in Crystal, ND, offers private-labeling services to retail, but salesman David Moquist says the company has very few requests. Of the 200,000 hundredweight the company ships,

we are a dry-land growing area. We can have extreme differentiation in volume from year to year making it more difficult to project production".

"We do see value in the data they provide and in working with different growing areas in the country," he adds.

"Any time farmers can work together for the common good is great," says David Moquist, O.C. Schulz & Sons Inc., Crystal, ND. "Our area has been looking at joining, and we may in the future — under the right conditions." However, he agrees with most of the region's shippers when he adds, "United was started in the West, among the russet-growing states. United has more of a fix to the russet situation."

"I think it's a good organization," says Tom Campbell, partner, Tri-Campbell Farms, Grafton, ND, who helped organize a Florida potato growers cooperative. "We were beating each other up so bad. We started a co-op, and it has worked. If we all have common communication, it should help with production control."

"I don't know why we would want to jump on a sinking ship," exclaims Randy Boushey of A & L Potato Co., East Grand Forks, MN. In his opinion, this type of cooperative works well in the early years but loses effectiveness with time. "We already have our own co-op, which gives us the ability to talk openly with each other."

"I think part of the problems with marketing stem from the fact that retailers aren't promoting potatoes and their healthful qualities as much as they used to," Maatz concludes. "From what we understand, potatoes are one of the most profitable parts of retail supermarket produce departments. They should appreciate that."

**pb**

"Most of our potatoes go to wholesalers and repackers."

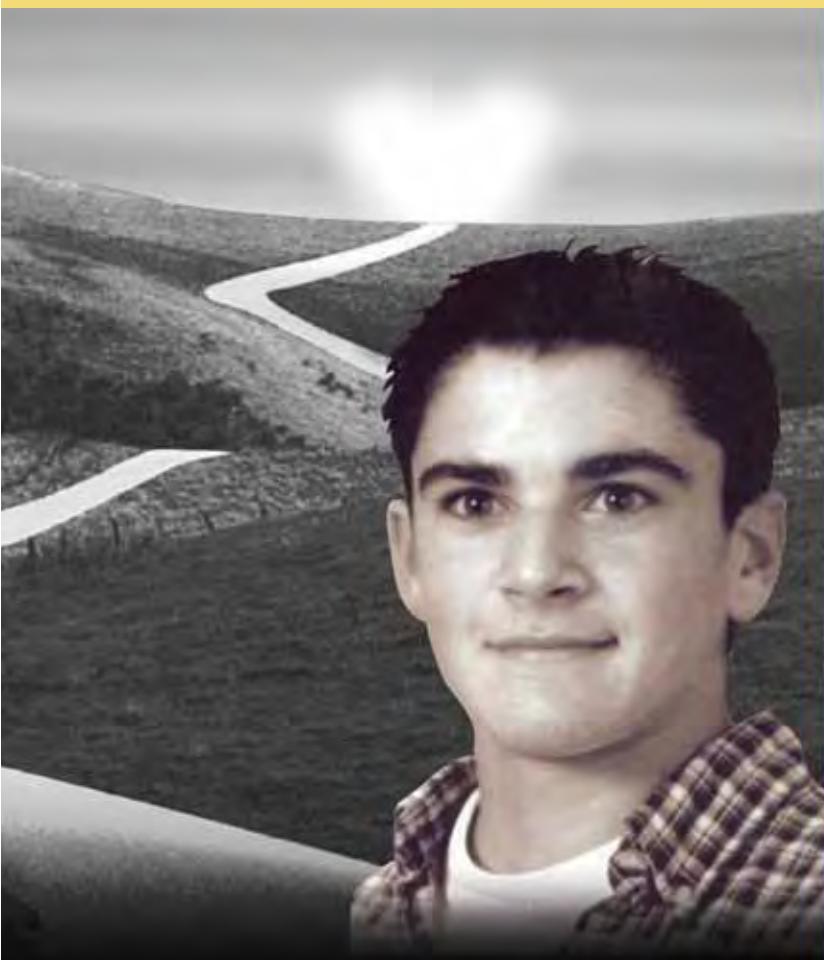
"Because we are a family farm and grow our own potatoes, we feel we can control the quality better. We can also provide a faster response time," he stresses. "Smaller wash plants can't be all things to all people, but we can be pretty responsive in providing the needs of wholesalers and repackers."

### CROP OUTLOOK

Non-irrigated crops often face big challenges as harvest approaches. According to Duane Maatz, NPPGA president, "It's been an average weather year, and we're expecting average yields."



*Survivors of "Louis' Law" in New York State Public Schools.*



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Contact [www.LA12.org](http://www.LA12.org) or the American Heart association for more information

## What's New

**ASSOCIATED POTATO GROWERS INC.** — New storage space for 100,000 additional hundredweight, which is now part of its Drayton, ND, facility "is making us a lot more efficient," reports Paul Dolan, manager of the co-op, which operates from three locations in the Red River Valley. "We continue to do more private labeling. The chains want to use their own label to build their own identity with their customers."



Associated Potato's Greg Holtman, Paul Dolan and Steve Johnson

**TRI-CAMPBELL FARMS** — A sizable addition to the company's Grafton, ND, packing facility was recently enhanced for packing efficiency and quality, according to Tom Campbell, partner. The company also purchased and installed a new poly-bagging machine.

These improvements mark the second consecutive year of extensive upgrades. Last year's additions included a new polishing washer, doubling of its cooler space, and installation of racks for triple stacking.

Campbell emphasizes the rising popularity of Tri-Campbell's microwavable, 8-ounce consumer pack and its 2-pound creamer mesh bag. "Our customers are going to smaller and smaller packs for retail."

**NOKOTA PACKERS INC.** — The Buxton, ND, company upgraded its ventilation system for improved storage quality, reports Steve Tweten, sales manager.

**O.C. SCHULZ & SONS, INC.** — An upgraded packing line and other new equipment added to the packing facility are among the improvements during the past year, reports salesman Dave Moquist. The company is shipping a greater portion of its volume in 2,200-pound totes to repackers.

"We're expecting to have a really good marketing year, with high demand," adds NPPGA's Kreis.

APGI's Dolan echoes that opinion and says growers in the area are reporting "a 90 to 95 percent yield, with some expecting a full crop. [Associated] will have fewer potatoes this year, but we will have a good quality, marketable crop with a good size profile." APGI currently has approximately 25 active growers.

"We've been shipping the new crop for three weeks already," A & L's Boushey reported in late August. "We're usually the first shipper to start." A & L is one of the few year-round potato distributors based in the Red River Valley. A & L makes its gradual transition to the new crop from Florida in January after the valley volume is sold.

Movement on reds in general "really depends on the demand function, which can have great variations," explains Maatz. The Red River Valley region produces about 5 million hundredweight of red potatoes for the fresh market. Red Norland is the most popular variety planted, comprising over 70 percent of this year's totals.

Organic potato plantings remain a very small percentage, only about 1 percent of the total.

**pb**

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# SAN LUIS VALLEY POTATOES



*From freight advantages to marketing opportunities, Colorado potatoes pack plenty of profit potential.*

BY SANDY LINDBLAD LEE

**A**s harvest and distribution gain momentum in early autumn throughout southwest Colorado's San Luis Valley potato production region, buyers are welcoming the new crop. The state's centralized location combined with a full range of marketing assistance provided through the Colorado Potato Administrative Committee (CPAC), Monte Vista, CO, are helping boost the appeal of Colorado potatoes and attract new enthusiasts.

The area averages more than 7,600 feet above sea level, so altitude is one of the reasons both Russet and specialty potato varieties grow well here. Add nutrition and convenience to the allure of Colorado potatoes, and their charm is unmatched.

Jim Ehrlich, CPAC executive director, estimates this year's planted acreage at 59,200, about a 1 percent decrease from 2006, which may be the result of a delay in crop maturity due to two nights of below-freezing temperatures in early June. "We were bone dry during June and most of July," he says. "Overall, though, it was a typical summer, heat-wise and with low humidity."

With its high elevation and low temperatures, winter freezing helps naturally sterilize the ground, lessening pest and disease pressures. This yields a smoother skin and more healthful product. Colorado ranks as the second largest fresh potato-producing state. Ehrlich also points out Colorado also is the No. 2 state in organic fresh potato production.

Although the vast majority of the San Luis Valley potato volume is in Russets, "We can grow any kind of potato people want here," Ehrlich stresses. With more than 60 varieties to choose from, "There is a Colorado potato to meet every specification."

Filling the increasing demand for specialty varieties are purple-, red-, and yellow-fleshed potatoes, which grow particularly well in

Colorado. The elongated, thin shape and colors of an assortment of Fingerlings have captured the attention of both professional chefs and amateur cooks who want unique home-serving ideas for families and guests at dinner parties.

"Convenience without cutting corners is key," stresses Linda Weyers, CPAC director of marketing. "With Colorado potatoes, we minimize the hassle of potato procurement by helping foodservice and retail buyers identify the best varieties to fit their needs. We take partnering seriously but with just the right pinch of character to make promoting potatoes fun."

In cooperation with its 23 shippers, CPAC offers distributor incentives, including "seasonal spiff," or help with contest setups "that send spuds flying," she notes.

CPAC retains Nogales, AZ-based Viva Marketing, headed by Veronica Kraushaar, to assist in coordinating promotions and merchandising. She helps conduct educational seminars to help inspire crews at both foodservice and retail. Popular "Potato 101" topics include handling and merchandising tips and healthy eating trends.

Sampling sessions have proven to increase sales. "Selecting varieties from our line-up that fit your bill perfectly is our mission," Kraushaar stresses, advising retailers to "allow us to set up a no-obligation demonstration of our superior quality and taste."

She also encourages menu promotions. "Interested in featuring us in your ads or table-tents? Contact us to inquire about seasonal co-op or shared cost opportunities," she adds.

## COLORADO POTATO MYSTIQUE DRAWS CROWDS

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**Linda Weyers, Jim Ehrlich and Xochitl Aguilera of the Colorado Potato Administrative Committee**



**Kurt Holland, Bill Wimberly and Tim Miller of Mountain Valley Produce**



**David Tonso and Matt Glowczewski of Canon Potato Co.**

says David Tonso, head of the CPAC marketing committee and director of sales for Canon Potato Company in Center, CO. "We kicked it off in a big way at the PMA Foodservice Conference in July."

Participation in major trade shows remains a priority for CPAC; the group exhibited for the first time at the Food & Wine Classic in June. Held in Aspen, CO, this prestigious show draws "high-end 'foodies,'" including big-name chefs and buyers from throughout the globe, Weyers says. Attendees were served Purple Peruvian Fingerlings featured in six different recipe selections.

"This trade show produced the most measurable results of any we've ever exhibited in," she stresses. "We had countless e-mails requesting product when we got back. PMA in Houston will be a big show for us this year since Texas is such a strong market for Colorado potatoes."

Another foodservice initiative is the annual Colorado Chef's Tour in September. Executive chefs from the region are CPAC's guests on tours of fields during harvest at the Colorado State University potato research center. Participants are treated to meals that showcase Colorado potatoes.

To assure a strong foodservice-based clientele in the future, CPAC sponsors a recipe contest through culinary schools in the surrounding region. This year's top winners were Mashed Potato Donuts, Potato Au Gratin and Potato Smoked Cheddar Soufflé.

## VARIETY AND VALUE

This season CPAC is a sponsor of Produce for Kids (PKF), the Orlando, FL-based children's charity that promotes produce consumption. According to Weyers, CPAC is seeking participation from a retail chain in the Midwest "that will take on the program for potatoes." The full-scale promotion offers advertising, sampling and point-of-



**Angela Aguirre, Bob Noffsinger, Tom Perrin and Randy Bache of Skyline Potato Co.**



**Rick Ellithorpe and Jed Ellithorpe of Aspen Produce LLC**

sale materials that "draw moms to the displays and get the kids to encourage their moms to purchase."

Although Colorado's freight advantage is the reason retailers often cite for buying potatoes from the Mile High state, yet procurers are discovering additional benefits that help boost sales. Research is validating the claim that new varieties help revitalize sales of the traditional Russets when featured in retail displays.

However, variety must be accompanied by educational information to help maximize merchandising. According to a CPAC-funded study, "Consumers exposed to information about better looking, tasting or more healthful potato varieties increase their intent to purchase," says Viva's Kraushaar.

"Their rate of interest in purchasing specialty varieties nearly tripled after consumers learned more about them," she adds. "Interest in purchasing all varieties of potatoes went up as high as 5 and 6 percent following brief exposure to facts and usage suggestions. It is also important to educate consumers regarding the superior nutritional attributes of certain Colorado potato varieties over others — especially those with colored skin or flesh."

For example, the Purple Majesty is a variety that holds its purple skin and flesh when cooked. The high phytonutrient content is comparable to wild blueberries, notes Canon's Tonso.

Results from ongoing research in the San Luis Valley growing region document the long-held belief in added health benefits

of Colorado produce. Since the San Luis Valley used to be a lake centuries ago, the resulting mineral soil can add nutrition to its produce, explains Dwayne Weyers of Aspen Produce LLC, in Center, CO.

More assistance at retail in 2007-08 involves "doing store checks to improve the quality of displays," CPAC's Linda Weyers says. CPAC's regional merchandisers "will check the potato displays in individual stores in the Midwest and Southeast. If they discover an issue, such as green potatoes on the display, for example, they will communicate both with the shipper and the receiver to alleviate the problem."

## FREIGHT ADVANTAGES

While the push to educate consumers on the variety, convenience and nutritional value of Colorado potatoes is ongoing, the natural freight advantage provided by the state's centralized location remains the top factor attracting buyers. Spiraling fuel costs make this attribute even more attractive.

Pam Dunning, fresh potato buyer and sales at J & M Produce Sales Inc., Fort Worth, TX, concurs. "Colorado potatoes can be delivered to our customers in one or two days, which makes them fresher and reduces shrink." One-stop potato shopping available through a single growing region can be another way to save on freight costs, she adds.

The 800-mile trip from the San Luis Valley to the Dallas-Fort Worth delivery points "can sometimes even be done overnight,"



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Jed Ellithorpe and Dwayne Weyers of Aspen Produce LLC



John McCormick, vice president of McCormick & Milne LLC and owner of Thunder Valley Speedway

Dunning notes. J & M Produce services both retail and foodservice distributors.

"The freight advantage is the primary reason we buy potatoes from Colorado," emphasizes Warren Workman, vice president of produce for in Coppell, TX-based Minyard Food stores Inc., a 70-store supermarket chain with locations centered in the Dallas-Fort Worth region. Colorado potatoes "are well-established in this market, and because of the location of our stores, price is very important to our customers," he continues. As a result of this price-consciousness, the popular, colored varieties, including Reds and yellow-flesh, "sell very poorly."

Still, San Luis Valley potatoes have good delivery and consistent quality and maintain their freshness because of their close proximity to the Dallas-Fort Worth market, Workman notes.

*Continued on page 198*



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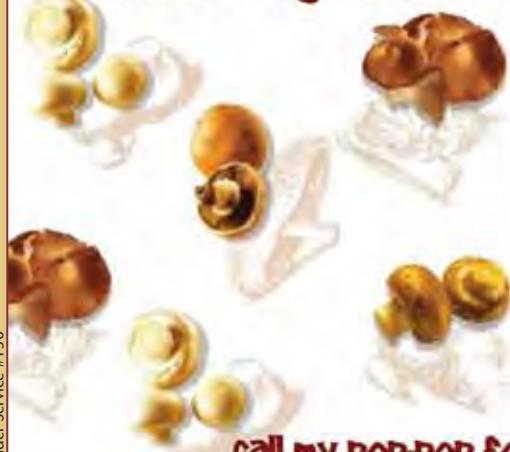
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Reader Service #137

## What's New

**C**anon Potato Company, Center, CO: The company recently remodeled and reconfigured the look of its packing facility. "With a special focus on food safety and sanitation, we've made key upgrades in our warehouse," reports David Tonso, director of sales. "It's a whole new ball game here."

"We tore out all of our old equipment, and we've replaced our transportation line," he explains. "We've rebuilt and reconfigured our packing line, with assistance of Gillenkirk Engineering out of Germany."

During renovations, the entire packing house was shut down, and all potato packing and shipments were completed from Martin Produce Company's facility in Greeley, CO. Canon and Martin established a marketing alliance several years ago.

"Now we are perfectly positioned to answer to the constantly evolving needs of the potato industry," Tonso says.

Salesperson Matt Glowczewski was chosen by the U.S. Potato Board, Denver, CO, to be Colorado's representative as one of the Mr. Potato Head balloon handlers in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade in New York, NY. Glowczewski will have to complete two separate training sessions prior to the parade to qualify for the task.

**Mountain Valley Produce, LLC, Center, CO:** Mountain Valley has increased its production of several varieties of Fingerlings and markets the volume through an alliance with Mountain King Potato Company, Houston TX..

Mountain Valley is in its second year of an alliance with Coastline and Taylor Farms California, Inc., both based in Salinas, CA, as regional distributors for Coastline's specific national accounts. The bulk of volume distributed through the affiliation is cleaned and cored iceberg lettuce and romaine, says office manager Virginia Myers.

**Skyline Potato Company, Center, CO:** Skyline is in its first year of handling organic Yellow Banana and Red Crescent Fingerlings. They are packaged in 2-

pound consumer packs and 50-pound cartons. "We now have the full assortment of organic potatoes, including Russets, Reds, Yukons, organic Blues and Fingerlings," says Randy Bache, sales and general manager.

The company markets a portion of its organic volume through Food Source Inc., Monterrey, CA, using the Tomorrow's Organic label. "At the same time, we sell our own Nature Fresh organic, which are available in the 3-, 5-, and 50-pound boxes, label through Skyline," he adds. "We will also pack private labels for organics."

Skyline completed a major upgrade to its potato-packing warehouse when it installed an auto-baler "to complete our fully automated palletizing line," Bache reports. "We designed, built and programmed the whole thing ourselves. Ivan Wright and Tom Beireger, Skyline employees, headed up the major project."

The new automation reduces the need for hand labor. "We not only increased efficiency, but we are also able to operate with four less people," an especially valuable asset because of the shrinking labor pool, Bache notes.

Larry Haley has joined the staff as the packinghouse foreman at Purely Organic, Skyline's organic packing facility. "He brings many years of experience, including working at Spud Seller and Apex Produce," Bache notes.

**Aspen Produce LLC, Center, CO:** The screen savers on two of the computers in the company offices now feature a variety of photos of the two newest additions to the family. The pictures on Aspen Produce partner Dwayne Weyers' computer are of grandson Evan Louis. The proud grandmother is Dwayne's wife Linda, director of marketing for the Colorado Potato Administrative Committee, Monte Vista, CO. The other new addition to the computer photo series is Liam Ellithorpe, who recently celebrated his first birthday. Liam is the son of Jed Ellithorpe, administrator and marketing coordinator.

in the potato category, you should increase the selections available."

Another way to enhance variety is to offer organic potatoes, an increasingly popular offering from San Luis Valley shippers. "Organics are a very specialized market, and we've proven as a shipping organization that we can produce a quality product," stresses Randy Bache, general manager, Skyline Potato Co., Center, CO. In addition to organic Russets, Reds, Yukon Golds and organic Blues, Skyline began offering organic in the Yellow Banana and Red Crescent Fingerlings this year. Fingerling packaging options are the 2-pound consumer size and the 50-pound carton.

"They are fresher, they have more flavor and variety, and they are convenient and economical," relates Ray Keegan of American Produce Co. LLC, a Denver, CO-based receiver that services retail and foodservice accounts. "Colorado potatoes are the best answer for my customers."

### NATIONAL AND STATE POTATO CO-OPS

Members of the trade are optimistic about strong FOB prices for the third consecutive season. Potato cooperatives, which formed across the country during the past two years, have been credited for contributing toward the market stabilization.

Beginning with an initiative in Idaho, the United Potato Growers of America (UPGA), headquartered in Salt Lake City, UT, was established with the "unilateral intent to bring supply back in balance with demand," notes CPAC's Ehrlich. There are several regional arms of this national cooperative including the United Potato Growers of Colorado, which maintains an office in Monte Vista, CO.

"United Potato Growers have done an excellent job educating the growers," Canon's Tonso says. "We're committed to improving the overall market structure for potatoes, long-term."

"We have been really impressed with United's impact," relates Virginia Myers of Mountain Valley Produce LLC, Center, CO. "They did a good job of marketing the crop, and everyone is working together more."

Canon's Tonso agrees, saying, "Colorado helped lead the country in maintaining strong prices."

"United has tried to educate growers on consumption, trends and supply management," notes Ellithorpe of Aspen Produce, who is also a member of the UPGA board of directors. "They are also encouraging growers to plan ahead before then plant their crop. You can't just roll the dice anymore if you're a grower."

*Continued from page 194*

Russets are the primary focus of fresh potato sales at Maynard's, he continues, with a variety of packaging offered alongside bulk displays. Stores generally stock Russet packs in 5-, 8-, and 15-pound sizes. The 5-pound consumer pack typically sells

the best.

Diverse packaging choices in addition to bulk displays are a proven factor for increasing sales, stresses Aspen's Jed Ellithorpe. "Research results continue to reinforce the concept that to improve profits

# Crossing Borders In Guacamole

*Inventive uses and new technologies are taking guacamole further than ever imagined.*

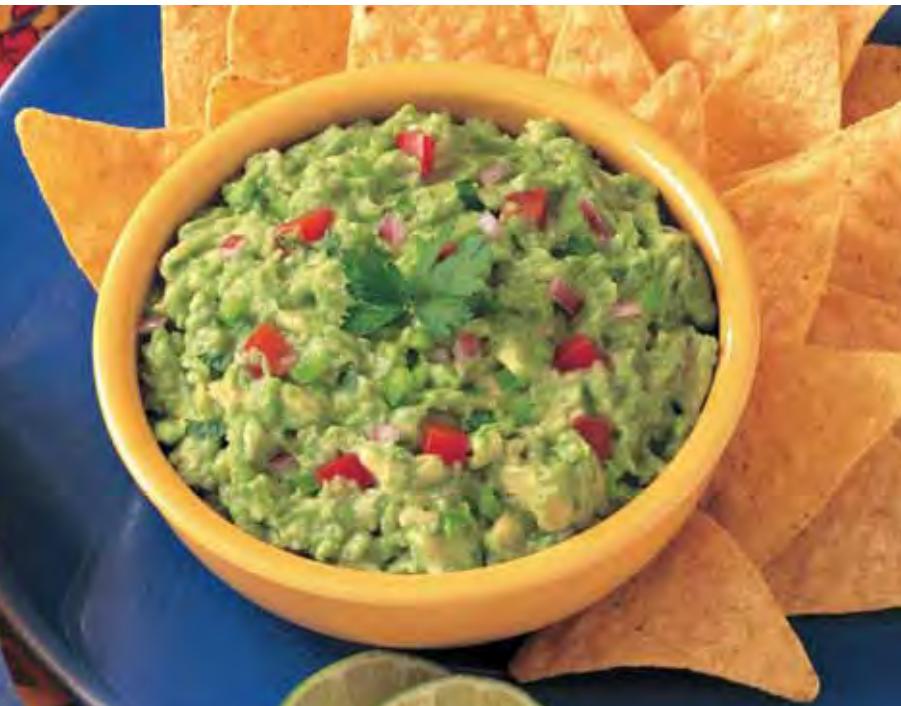
BY JODEAN ROBBINS

**G**uacamole, an ancient ethnic dish, has made its way into mainstream American culture and is credited with helping encourage many U.S. consumers to eat avocados and other traditional Mexican food.

"We're seeing a lot more avocados used in general for various applications including guacamole," says Jan DeLyser, vice president of sales and marketing for the California Avocado Commission (CAC), Irvine, CA.

Dan McGrath, foodservice manager for Mission Produce, Inc., Oxnard, CA, agrees. "We've seen increased consumer interest in the last few years. More and more mainstream restaurants have added avocado and guacamole on their menus. The influence of shows like *Top Chef* has also helped in bringing avocados to the forefront of public awareness."

Guacamole offers foodservice operators a versatile and interesting product with health attributes. Plus, its popularity continues to provide opportunity. "Several factors have contributed to the increased popularity of guacamole," states Walter Scheib, former White House chef to Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush and owner of The American Chef, Great Falls, VA. "People have become more and more aware of the trend away from lots of proteins and meats and toward fruits and vegetables, and you're seeing more interest in things with unique flavor. Also people are more and more inclined to dine in an ethnic style. Guacamole is a major component of



**Guacamole has transcended its ethnic roots and is now a part of the mainstream American food culture.**

Photo courtesy of California Avocado Association

the Mexican and Tex-Mex cuisine and an increasingly important component of Caribbean fusion as well."

Kajsa Dilger, executive chef of Ciudad restaurant in Los Angeles, CA, says guacamole adds a bit of comfort to people's dining experience. "Our menu can be a bit eclectic and guacamole is an item people recognize. It is the beginning of introducing other flavors to them."

## VERSATILE PRODUCT

While traditional Mexican recipes are still primary, many restaurants are invent-

ing new and innovative uses for this popular seller. "Many non-Mexican restaurants have guacamole on their menus and use on sandwiches is also increasing," reports Phil Henry, president of Henry Avocado Corporation, Escondido, CA. "Numerous sandwich shop owners have told me when they add avocado slices to a sandwich, it immediately boosts sales."

According to Cindy Wong, vice president of foodservice for Fresherized Foods, Ft. Worth, TX, "We see it widely used today from appetizers all the way through to dessert. In general, it is not an ethnic food



**Guacamole's perception as fresh and healthful has helped spur its popularity.**

camole is also a great entrance into ethnic dining. If people are intimidated by other ethnic items, usually guacamole is safe and can help move customers toward the idea of more to dining than just meat and potatoes."

Guacamole is also crossing international boundaries with new recipes. "We're promoting international guacamoles," CAC's DeLyser reports. "There are new and fun recipes like Cajun Guacamole, Caribbean Guacamole, French Kiss Guacamole and Greek Guacamole on our Web site."

"It is moving out of the chip-and-dip appetizer category," Fresherized Foods' Wong says. "We see it a lot now in seafood and with steak or chicken or even in dessert as a sorbet or smoothie."

"Guacamole is fairly well recognized as part of the Hispanic cuisine," Scheib says. "But, there are lots of ways to make it unique outside of this cuisine including in a Floribbean cuisine or other fusion cuisines. It's a fun food and there are lots of different things you can do with it. It goes well with lots of beverages and is a nice party food."

#### FRESH AND HEALTHFUL

Most restaurants still make guacamole from scratch and pride themselves on their

any more. The versatility of guacamole is huge in the foodservice sector."

Some industry officials say they use guacamole more as a garnish and less as a side dish. "We've done a lot with avocado and different applications," Ciudad's Dilger says. "We do an Argentinean salad made with almost all the ingredients of guacamole, but in a chunk fashion with cooked egg added."

"Broader exploration of guacamole by chefs and home cooks and their interest in personalizing it has expanded the reach of guacamole and avocados," says Jay C. Humphreys, president of Ultimate Avocado, McAllen, TX. "Because of this wider acceptance, chefs and restaurants are using this ingredient in a more creative ways."

Restaurants are also beginning to use guacamole as a highlighted and fun menu item. "There are a number of Mexican-style restaurants merchandising guacamole as a major part of their first course," Scheib of the American Chef says. "They bring out the avocado in a large stone bowl and then allow the customers to choose their own ingredients to add to it, making it fresh right at the table. They are using it as a lead and it's working very well for them."

In terms of presentation, tableside guacamole can be a big hit among diners, according to Henry of Henry Avocado. "The guacamole is obviously fresh when it is made in front of the consumer. Other restaurants, such as Rubio's Fresh Mexican Grill [based in Carlsbad, CA], have open kitchens so the customer can see the ingredients and the fresh preparation of the avocados, tomatoes, etc."

Putting guacamole on the menu can render multiple benefits. "Guacamole provides

merchandising opportunity," Scheib explains. "It's a great product for getting people to buy an extra course and have an extra cocktail. I really like the idea of the guacamole cart. You're making it to order and customizing it in front of the guest. Guacamole is also a great entrance into ethnic dining. If people are intimidated by other ethnic items, usually guacamole is safe and can help move customers toward the idea of more to dining than just meat and potatoes."

Guacamole is also crossing international boundaries with new recipes. "We're promoting international guacamoles," CAC's DeLyser reports. "There are new and fun recipes like Cajun Guacamole, Caribbean Guacamole, French Kiss Guacamole and Greek Guacamole on our Web site."

Photo courtesy of California Avocado Commission

## The New Guacamole

In the future, the avocado itself may very well be the new guacamole. As American consumers have now accustomed their palate and accepted guacamole as mainstream cuisine, the avocado is forecast to make its own play for popularity.

"The next big trend is to move from guacamole to other avocado applications," according to Steve Parnell, president of Fresherized Foods, Ft. Worth, TX. "Guacamole has been the standard for a long time. The foodservice challenge now is to introduce people to high-quality avocado."

According to Walter Scheib, former White House chef to Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush and owner of The American Chef, Great Falls, VA, confining avocados to use only as guacamole sells the commodity short. "I use avocado in many different applications and find them to be very versatile. They can be used in an omelet, as base for a salsa, or with fish. Avocado is a great substitute for melted cheese due to the texture."

Currently, a good number of foodservice establishments are using avocado in innovative menu preparations. "Guacamole is really what put avocados on the map, but now restaurants are using avocados in sushi rolls, on pizza and in many other ways," notes Jan DeLyser, vice president of sales and marketing for the California Avocado Commission (CAC), Irvine, CA.

Ciudad restaurant, Los Angeles, CA offers a Peruvian Causa. "This is a potato terrine layered with slices of avocado and topped with seafood salad," Kajsa Dilger, executive chef, explains. "We do soups with avocado in the summertime."

CAC suggests several rather unusual recipe ideas on its Web site, including Avocado Schnitzel, Avocado Pate, Beer-Battered Fried Avocado Wedges, Avocado Cheesecake and Avocado Ice Cream.

"We're seeing avocado now in shrimp recipes, ceviche recipes and ice creams," relates Dan McGrath, foodservice manager for Mission Produce, Inc., Oxnard, CA. "Although guacamole remains the top concept, it's only the beginning."

pb

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Photo courtesy of Fresherized Foods

recipes. "Our customers make guacamole from scratch not only because it produces a fresher product but because it showcases the restaurant's commitment to freshness and quality," Henry of Henry Avocado notes. "It is very easy for restaurants throughout the United States to have fresh avocados on their menus year-round because of their widespread availability."

Mission's McGrath says freshness and convenience are key factors involved in making quality guacamole. "Many restau-

rants use their guacamole to set them apart from others," he adds.

For instance, Ciudad restaurant creates its guacamole from scratch, Dilger reports. "The ability to control the texture is why we chose to stay with making our own."

Avocados are an ingredient foodservice operators can use in marketing healthful choices. "More and more, food service is playing up the health benefits of avocados," Fresherized Foods' Wong notes. "When restaurants

look at raw material ingredients, avocado is being thought of a lot more as a great ingredient."

"Guacamole will be perceived as a more healthy choice than a dairy or meat option," according to Scheib of The American Chef. "In many current restaurant applications, guacamole is paired with other high-fat items, like cheese, sour cream or other taco-like components. Operators must be careful not to stigmatize guacamole and instead show how it can also be used in more

healthful meals, for example as a component of a citrus salad."

Avocados offer significant nutrition claims. "Avocados are high in potassium, fiber and the good fats," states McGrath. "They're a healthful food, sustainable and available in more and more restaurants. Restaurants like Ruby Tuesday [headquartered in Maryville, TN], Applebee's [headquartered in Overland Park, KS] and Cheesecake Factory [headquartered in Calabasas Hills, CA] have begun to develop menu concepts including avocados."

"Avocado always enhances the nutritional statement," agrees Steve Parnell, president of Fresherized Foods. "There is a recent health study just released by the University of Ohio, Comprehensive Cancer Center, talking about the benefits of avocado with respect to oral cancer."

"Avocados are a perfect food in terms of versatility and nutrition," Ultimate's Humphreys points out. "People with diabetes can enjoy avocados because there is absolutely no sugar in this fruit. There are also no trans fats, cholesterol or sodium, and avocados offer more protein, potassium, magnesium, folic acid, thiamin, riboflavin, niacin, biotin, pantothenic acid and vitamins E and K per ounce than any other fruit. This

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## CONVENIENCE ON THE HORIZON

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**"We're not taking away the originality of their recipes. For most restaurants, the key to success is their originality and recipes, so they're looking for ingredients they can use but with flexibility."**

— Cindy Wong  
Fresherized Foods

restaurants additional choices in the fresh versus manufactured guacamole conundrum. Companies are now offering product that they describe as fresh-processed and that restaurants can use to prepare their own freshly made recipes.

"The re-invention of guacamole began several years ago with the use of UHP [ultra-high pressure] technology to process avocados," reports Al Ahmer, vice president of sales and production, processed products for Calavo Growers, Inc., Santa Paula, CA. "Our finished guacamole product is all natural with no preservatives."

The high-pressure system locks in freshness and flavor and ensures a 50-day refrigerated shelf life. The products may also be frozen after purchase. Calavo offers several fresh UHP products including Chunky Avocado Pulp, Chunky Avocado and several guacamole items.

Fresherized Foods processes more than two million pounds a week of fresh avocado into several UHP products. "We produce made-to-order products for many foodservice and retail customers in the United States," Parnell says. "The technology allows production of fresh product with no preservatives or additives. The customer can take



advocates of the technology point out the fresh quality. "It is a common misperception to consider this product as manufactured," Parnell says. "This is chunky, fresh avocado. Liken it to fresh-cut produce rather than canned."

## CUSTOMER CHOICE

These UHP products still allow operators to customize their guacamole recipes. "Our product allows them to still hand-make guacamole from their own recipe

but save time," Parnell says. "Our business has grown with the scratch user because of the quality of our product and since it is still fresh avocado." Offering year-round, consistent supply has allowed Fresherized Foods to grow the business by converting customers who have had trouble sourcing, he adds.

"We're not taking away the originality of their recipes," Fresherized's Wong explains. "For most restaurants, the key to success is their originality and recipes, so they're looking for ingredients they can

use but with flexibility."

These new products may provide a viable alternative in some situations and for some operators. "We are a proponent for what the customer wants," McGrath adds. "Some customers are still using fresh avocados out of the bag, which is great for them. But for others who want the convenience, we're offering this product as an addition."

Calavo's Ahmer notes, "The more traditional Mexican restaurants use fresh avocados, but as the quality and flavor of the all-fresh and natural UHP avocado products become known, many restaurants are converting due to consistency in quality, flavor, color and texture, shelf life, and consistency in pricing and availability"

For example, Scheib reports, "I've spent a lot of time in very good hotels and restaurants across the country with The American Chef, and any time I make guacamole, I always look for good, fresh, ripe avocado, and make it fresh. However, there may be application for a pre-prepared avocado product for large foodservice applications where using fresh whole avocados is just not feasible given the quantity involved. Therefore, this newer UHP product may be viable for those operators."

pb

Photos courtesy of Ultimate Avocado

**Ultra-high pressure (UHP) technology allows processors to offer foodservice what they describe as fresh-processed product.**

the fresh-scooped product and add their own ingredients."

In February 2008, Mission Produce will launch a UHP product line under the Mr. Avocado brand name. Initial products will include Classic Guacamole and Classic Avocado Halves. Both products will complement Mission's fresh avocado program.

"We're proud to announce the development and release of the UHP products," Mission's McGrath states. "This is fresh avocado placed under a high-pressure process, which eliminates bacteria and pathogens. Use of these products reduces shrink and labor in the kitchen. Foodservice operators can utilize this product without the inconvenient aspects of doing it completely from scratch."

Ultimate Avocado offers a new ultimate guacamole and a purée. "Our products allow chefs to customize their guacamole to their personal taste," Humphreys explains. "Restaurants will add fresh, ripe, chunky avocados to our guacamole, which increases servings per package. Some will add salt, lime, pepper, tomato, onion or garlic - it really depends on the individual chef or market."

While these products are processed,

# Pecans — More Than A Seasonal Favorite

*Besides being a popular snack, pecans are essential to holiday baking.*

BY BOB JOHNSON

**A**longtime favorite during the holiday season, pecans are a popular ingredient in many seasonal recipes — making them a prime item for promotion and cross-promotion during late fall and early winter.

"Pecans can be a profitable product for retailers, especially around Thanksgiving and Christmas," says Jon Krueger, communications specialist for the National Pecan Shellers Association (NPSA), Atlanta, GA. "Pecans are also an ideal ingredient for baking, due to their versatility, full flavor, tender texture and appearance. Retailers may have success by cross-merchandising pecans near baking products."

Pecans have expanded their appeal far beyond this fairly narrow holiday baking niche. Consumers use them as ingredients in appetizers, salads, side dishes, desserts and entrées or as snacks. And these increasingly important uses are always in season.

A growing awareness that pecans are among the most healthful items in the store is driving the broader appeal. "Demand for pecans is increasing year-round," Krueger adds. "Over the past 10 years or so, pecans have enjoyed an expanded market among health-conscious consumers."



Photo courtesy of Georgia Pecan Commission

Until research proved otherwise, pecans and other nuts were thought to be a somewhat forbidden treat — a tasty but fattening

**Consumers seek out pecans for cooking, baking and snacking.**

snack. "While years ago, pecans were considered to be an unhealthful, fatty food, the perception is quickly changing," according to Brandon Harrell, sales manager of Harrell Nut Company, Camilla, GA.

Recent research and publicity from numerous nut crop groups have dramatically turned around public perception in a fairly short period of time. "There is a lot of new research available that shows the great health benefits of pecans," he continues. "Just this past year, our industry received FDA [Food and Drug Administration] approval to promote pecans as 'Heart Healthy' products."

Like other nut foods, pecans can help to reduce the risk of heart disease, cancer and obesity. "Pecans have lots of health benefits and can actually lower bad cholesterol; they have many vitamins and lots of fiber," notes Sherry Tischler, office and retail store man-

## Storing Pecans -

**T**eaching consumers how to care for pecans may make the difference between a disgruntled customer and a repeat customer.

Pecans are perishable and their shelf life varies greatly with the temperature.

Once the consumer opens a package, the pecans, should be used within 30 to 45 days unless it is frozen or refrigerated, explains Bruce Caris, vice president for sales and marketing, Green Valley Pecan, Tucson, AZ.

The difference in shelf life between room-temperature, refrigerated and frozen pecans is dramatic. "After you purchase them, you should keep them refrigerated," says Paul Rich, vice president for sales for Ellis Pecan Co. in Forth Worth, TX. "The worst thing for pecans is heat."

When pecans are stored at room temperature, they last three to six months, Rich adds. They will last up to a year if refrigerated, and when frozen, pecans can stay fresh for up to two years.

The best way to freeze pecans is in a sealed plastic bag; they can still maintain flavor and texture after being thawed and refrozen during that two-year span.

Retailers have a little more latitude because in-store product is generally sealed in a bag, the shell or both. Pecans can be stored in a cool, dry place for six months or more while still in the shell.

The best possible care means keeping the pecans in a controlled environment. "We keep them refrigerated in our retail store," Rich continues.

"Pecans really need to be refrigerated for maximum shelf life and to insure great taste quality; unfortunately most stores do not refrigerate," says Sherry Tischler, office and retail store manager for San Saba Pecan Warehouse and Gift Shop, San Saba, TX.

If pecans cannot be refrigerated, it is important to turn them over every few weeks to keep the stock fresh.

Proper care means pecans must be kept in a cool place. "Pecans are perishable; they can go rancid," notes John Williams, principal, Sahlman Williams, Tampa, FL, which represents the Georgia Pecan Commission, Atlanta, GA. "Pecans need proper storage, preferably in the produce department. The Georgia Pecan Commission promotes keeping pecans fresh. Retailers should keep them in a cool area."

**pb**

ager for San Saba Pecan Warehouse and Gift Shop, San Saba, TX.

However, this good news will not help sales unless consumers associate those attributes with a good-tasting product. "We need to impress on people all of the health benefits of pecans," Tischler says. "And then let them taste them."

The key is to find a way to translate the shift in public perception into an effective merchandising campaign.

### THE HEALTHFUL DISPLAY

One place to look for display ideas is the

natural food industry, which frequently leads the pack in marketing good health.

"Some natural food stores have put all their nuts together in a display and included nutritional information," says Bruce Caris, vice president for sales and marketing, Green Valley Pecan, Tucson, AZ.

This concept can be expanded to include other nutritional powerhouse foods because cross-merchandising is a proven sales builder. "Retailers can take advantage of the fact that pecans are loaded with 19 vitamins and minerals, as well as antioxidants, by setting up a display for 'Power

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Foods," NPSA's Krueger suggests. "Studies have shown that pecans are the most antioxidant-rich tree nut and one of the most antioxidant rich-foods in general. A retailer's display could spotlight pecans and other high-antioxidant foods such as blueberries, apples, cranberries and strawberries."

The Georgia Pecan Commission, Atlanta, GA, has come up with its own comprehensive program to get out the message about the health and versatility of pecans. In October, the Commission is scheduled to launch a new marketing campaign under a new logo with the slogan, *Georgia Pecans Fit*.

The tagline is intended to associate pecans with fitness in a number of ways: They keep you fit. They fit in many different sorts of recipes. And they fit into many different times of the year.

"There is a lot of good news for the retailer to tell the customer about the nutritional benefits of pecans," explains John Williams, principal of Sahlman Williams, the Tampa, FL-based public relations firm representing the Georgia Pecan Commission.

The bottom line is it is essential to find a way to get the nutritional message about pecans to consumers while they are in the

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Photo courtesy of Georgia Pecan Commission

**Even while working to attract the growing number of health-conscious consumers, it is important to remember pecan sales will still always peak with holiday baking.**

produce section of the store.

But even while working to attract the growing number of health-conscious consumers, it is important to remember pecan sales will still always peak with holiday baking. "Most pecans are used for baking," Green Valley's Caris says.

He advises package some pecans and specifically earmarking them for baking. "One of the things we suggest to retailers is to buy broken or cut pieces in the bag and mark it as Cut for Baking," he advises. "On the East Coast, we do this quite effectively." Since consumers are used to buying halves, he adds, "getting them to buy pieces is another part of the education program." **pb**

### KERRY'S BROMELIAD NURSERY, HOMESTEAD, FL

Alex Sevilla has been hired as vice president of sales and marketing. He will be responsible for leading the expansion of U.S. sales and developing international business. His extensive background includes agribusiness management, marketing, and sales throughout Central America. Sevilla most recently consulted in Nicaragua within the real estate financial industry.



### ORCHID VENTURE LAUNCHED

Sion Orchids, De Lier, The Netherlands, has teamed with CosMic Plants Inc., Beamsville, ON, Canada, for the production and supply of rooted phalaenopsis young plants to the North American market. The orchids will be six months old and grown in a community tray in a bark mixture. The first availability is scheduled for January 2008.



Reader Service No. 351

### GIFT FOR GARDENERS

Schubert Nursery, Inc., Salinas, CA, introduces its handmade Rustica Window basket with four of Schubert's quality plants in weathered clay pots and available with premium ferns, ivy or four herbs. The company encourages floral retailers to merchandise the plant-filled wire baskets as the perfect host gift or gardener's gift.



Reader Service No. 353

### MAKE PRODUCTS SING

KnA Enterprises, Miami, FL, has created Luv'n Sounds, a co-marketing, valued-added concept with tailored music CDs as floral and gift add-ons. Luv'n Sounds Bouquet sleeves hold the CDs featuring the song *I Honestly Love You* for Valentine's Day and *Natural Woman* for Mother's Day. Ideal for seasonal and special promotions, private labeling is offered.



Reader Service No. 355

### POTS LOOK LIKE ORNAMENTS

Hermann Engelmann Greenhouses, Inc., Apopka, FL, offers the Foliage Ornaments Collection by Exotic Angel Plants featuring high-quality ceramic pots in the shape of Christmas tree ornaments. Paired with more than 300 foliage varieties, the pots are designed with a self-watering option. The collection is available in sparkling red and gold.



Reader Service No. 357

### TROPICALS YEAR-ROUND

Westland Greenhouses, Grand Bend, ON, Canada, is now offering *Anthurium andeanum* in a 6-inch pot. All colors — pink, salmon, white, red, orange and burgundy — are available year-round and are shipped eight plants in a box. The company exclusively grows European varieties and ships the plants wrapped in matching Mylars and decorated for seasons and holidays.



Reader Service No. 359

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### GREEN EXPRESSIONS UNVEILED

Arko Associates, Inc., Spring, TX, and RJT Foliage, Apopka, FL, announce a joint venture featuring a new trademarked line of potted foliage and floral upgrades called Green Expressions. Peter Arnett of Arko Associates and Jim Mislang of RJT Foliage have more than 20 years of experience each in supermarket foliage, including the retail, wholesale, and grower levels.



Reader Service No. 350

### WORLD FLORAL EXPO SET FOR MARCH

HPP Exhibitions, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, announces the Fourth Annual World Floral Expo will be held March 4-6, 2008 in Miami, FL, at the Sheraton Miami Mart Hotel & Convention Center. Joining international sellers with wholesale and high-volume retail buyers from across the United States and Canada, the exhibition includes educational seminars and floral company tours.



Reader Service No. 352

## NEW PRODUCTS

### TABLES SHOWCASE PRODUCTS

Floral Merchandising Systems, Minneapolis, MN, debuts Square Nesting Tables to merchandise flowers, plants and giftware. All tables can be used independently or retailers can nest them together. Available in a set of three, the galvanized tables are lightweight yet sturdy and are shown with the optional black powder coating.



Reader Service No. 354

### WRAP IT UP

Highland Supply Corporation, Highland, IL, now offers Wrapid-O, a one-step method of applying and sealing protective sleeves around potted flowers and plants. The protective upper sleeve portion can be easily removed. Wrapid-O does not roll down the side of the pot, can be clear or printed and may be used with a detachable label.



Reader Service No. 356

### GEL BEADS STORE WATER

JRM Chemical, Inc., Cleveland, OH, offers Deco Beads and Deco Cubes as new items in the Crystal Accents line of water-storing gel products. Available in six colors, the nontoxic, polymer gems are used for cut flowers, home décor, weddings and candles. The company offers small case sizes with no minimum orders.



Reader Service No. 358

### AWAKEN HOLIDAY SPIRIT

Soy Basics, New Hampton, IA, is offering a selection of natural soy wax candles in seven fragrances to awaken the holiday spirit. Made from American-grown soy beans, the featured fragrances in the Soy Inspirations line are Pumpkin Pie, Hot Apple Cider, Holiday Cookies, Hot Chocolate, Mistletoe, Candy Cane and Holiday Greetings.



Reader Service No. 360

# Little Plants With Big Potential

*Petite, mini flowering plants present opportunities to expand sales.*

BY HEATHER CROW

**T**hey are little, undeniably cute, distinct within the floral category — and yet few are sure just where they belong. Categorized as mini, petite or miniaturized, these plants are sold at retail in pots less than 2½ inches wide, usually flowering but sometimes only foliage.

There are endless occasions when these small plants make an affordable, convenient gift, and retailers would do well to keep a supply on hand for consumers looking for an inexpensive way to say thank you, how are you, miss you and much more.

Bill Byland, vice president of Milstadt, IL-based Micky's Mini Flora Express, a major grower of the diminutive plants, describes the target consumer as someone for whom size and price are major considerations. "These fit well on a window sill, a desk or at an individual place setting. Often we find kids drive the purchase when they want to give something to a favorite teacher. They're attracted to the bright colors and the size. Moms like the attractive price points."

Bloomrite Gardens, a wholesale nursery division of Nurserymen's Exchange, Inc., Half Moon Bay, CA, is looking at Gen-Xers as an entirely new audience. These consumers often live in small apartments or condos in high-priced markets where living spaces tend to be small but interest in flowers or plants remains large.

According to Byland, retailers have to have an idea on how to merchandise minis if they want them to sell well. "Mini flower-



**Mini plants are often impulse purchases and can do well positioned both in and out of the floral department.**



Photo courtesy of Micky's Mini Flora Express

ing plants generate incremental sales and have the potential to turn grocery customers into floral customers as well," he explains. "It all hinges on where and how well these plants are displayed."

Reinhold Holtkamp, owner of Holtkamp Greenhouses, Inc., Nashville, TN, adds, "For us, miniaturized plants are a miniature market — a tight niche far from core floral market segments. The personal poinsettia is an easy sell during the holidays, but during the rest of the year you need something added like a ceramic cup or figure."

A cautious retail proponent, Michael Schrader, director of floral for Schnucks, St. Louis, MO, relates, "We like them and we use them but carefully, mostly in-and-out. They're a novelty and look great clustered on a floral counter. We don't, however, want them to compete with cut flowers or larger plants, or become a substitute. Roses and poinsettias work particularly well for us."

Mary Oldham, spokesperson for Nurserymen's Exchange, is much more enthusiastic about the potential of petite plants and is

Photo courtesy of Nurserymen's Exchange, Inc.



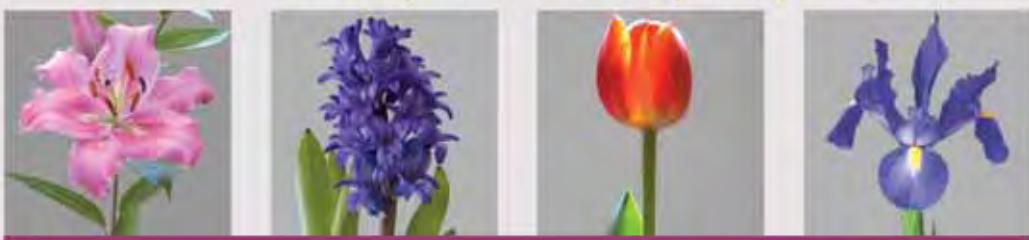
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working hard to change attitudes. "We believe there is plenty of room for innovation in the plants and in promotion and merchandising programs for retailers," she relates. "We've made this a larger segment of our business plan and encourage retailers to be more strategic in their planning so that encouraging customers to think flowers and plants is a 365-day opportunity."

Nurserymen's Exchange helps retailers with holiday promotions throughout the year. "Our best-selling products range from

**"We like them and we use them but carefully, mostly in-and-out. They're a novelty and look great clustered on a floral counter."**

— Michael Schrader  
Schnucks

decorated Italian Stone Pines in 2- to 3-inch pots at Christmas to a 'welcome spring' line of daffodils, hyacinths and mascara bulbs to fascinating Venus flytraps, petite roses, campanula and two varieties of full-budded echeveria. Many of these have containers that are as important as the plant in driving consumer value perception. And, we've developed display cases to help retailers maximize visibility," she continues.

#### THINK OUTSIDE THE FLORAL DEPARTMENT

If petite plants are the ultimate impulse item, perhaps retailers should rethink how they are merchandised. "Put a mass display wherever customers are thinking quick gifts or where they pause for any reason," advises Chris Buss, president of TotalFloral LLC, a Homestead, FL-based full-service floral management company. These places include in the aisle next to greeting cards, by checkout counters, in the housewares section or in the pharmacy department. "These are impulse hot spots where novelty items can capture new business. It is important, however, that the plants sell fast. Although most are self-contained with reservoir pots, they are small and can dry out quickly. They have to show up well to sell."

## Variety, Variety, Variety

**R**etailers have a broad choice of plants adapted to the mini segment. Some are clearly seasonal while many are available year-round. Some are grown from cuttings or from seed in greenhouses. It is important, however, that all parts of the plant be in scale if they plants are to be visually appealing. This includes small flowers and leaves. Minis should not be too tall. Do not limit your color choices. These are the most successful mini plant species:

Azaleas  
Curly Bamboo  
Begonia  
Cacti and succulents  
Campanulas  
Chrysanthemums  
Crocus  
Daffodils and other spring bulbs  
Echeveria  
Exacum  
Ferns  
Herbs  
Ivy and other foliage  
Kalanchoe  
Lucky Bamboo  
Oxalis  
Poinsettias  
Roses  
Shamrocks  
Venus Flytraps  
Violets

Mini plants allow retailers to expand almost any holiday tie-in. Events such as back-to-school, St. Patrick's Day and Secretary's Day are less associated with lavish floral purchases than holidays such as Valentine's Day or Mother's Day. This makes them ideal for retailers to offer mini plants as a way of acknowledging the occasion. Highly affordable price points between \$2 and \$6 make these items especially attractive impulse purchases.

Ed Corvelo, floral buyer for Save Mart Supermarkets, based in Modesto, CA, agrees. "We carry miniature plants for the spring holidays because they give us additional sales. We tend to display them close to the store entrance near the produce department. They are an impulse item that customers like to give to friends and co-workers, much like a greeting card."

pb

Tom Lavagetto, president of Floral Consulting Group, a Spokane, WA-based floral consulting practice, urges retailers to use the equivalent of several cases of mixed varieties in a display to increase consumer choice. "Without a generous display, mini-plants tend to disappear out of sight," he says.

#### WHAT CONSUMERS NEED TO KNOW

It is hard to say whether mini plants should play a role more like that of plants or more like that of cut flowers.

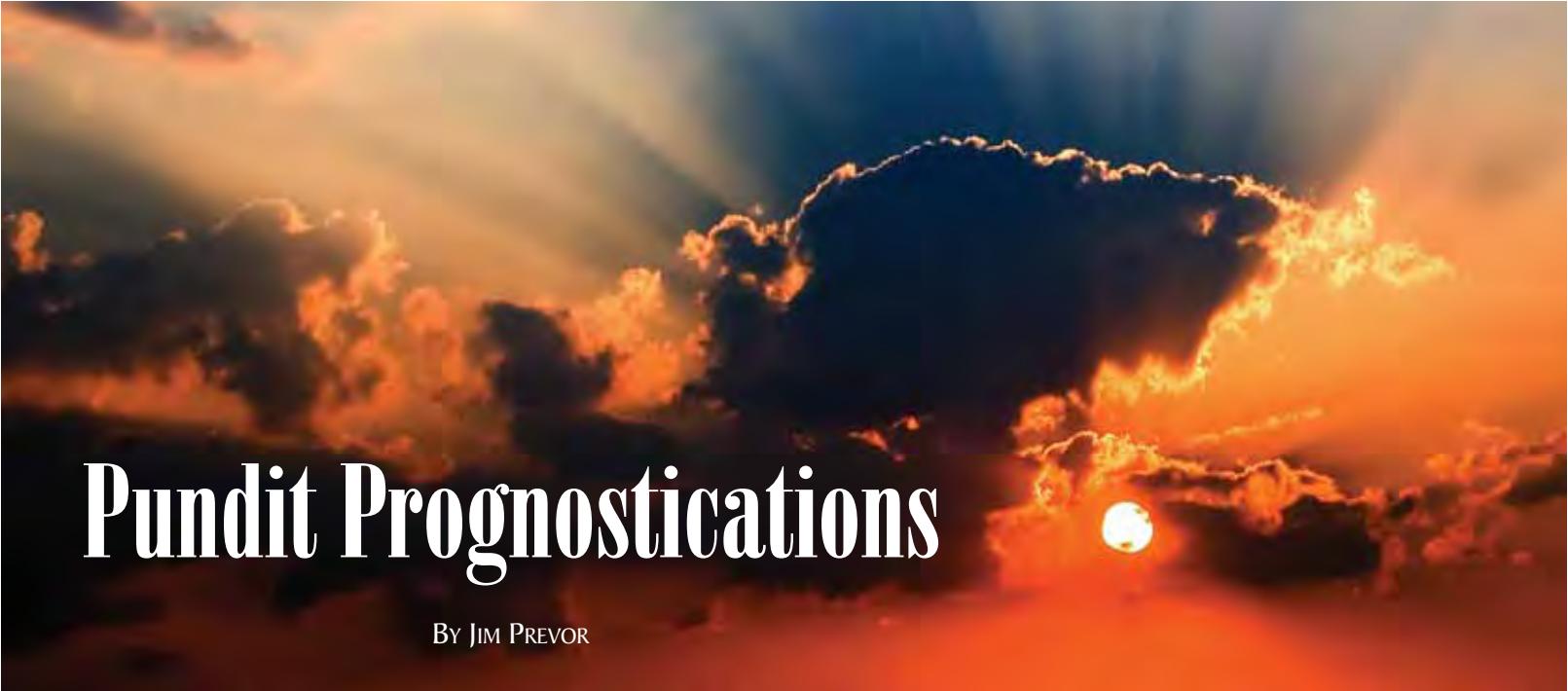
If properly cared for, a realistic estimate of shelf life is about 10 to 30 days. Growers prefer to ship within limited geography

based on both time and shipping costs, although some ship nationwide.

Working with consumers to understand that these plants are the stuff of celebrations — fun to give or have for short periods of time without great expectations for longevity — should help develop sales and returning customers who will buy them whenever they are available.

Not all mini plants come with use-and-care information. Grower Web sites are becoming a vital source of care instructions. Using reservoir pots or a water-retentive medium are important tools for making sure the brightly colored flowering plants thrive and satisfy customers.

pb



# Pundit Prognostications

BY JIM PREVOR

A Pundit's prognostications,  
Put in poetry today —  
A rhyme, a rhythm and some stanzas  
On thoughts about our day.

It seems so very different —  
A brave and daring way  
To present ideas compelling,  
What our industry needs to say.  
And yet this couplet offering  
Is not such distant ground,  
For what we do each morning  
Is seek that silent sound...  
Find the rhythm that's unspoken...  
Catch the drift that is unseen...  
Uncover a hidden meaning...  
And complete the un-played scene...

It seems a task so daunting.  
How can we know what's true?  
Yet we've found a truly gifted source  
In this industry - IT'S YOU!

So we all head out to Houston,  
To attend the PMA.  
To meet old friends  
And daydream  
Of what we used to say.  
We once were so much younger  
And saw the world anew.  
Now we're worldly, filled with wisdom,  
But we'd rather have our youth.

Pundits never die, you know;  
They do not age at all.  
They live through their meanderings  
In words upon the wall.  
Yet such is true of everyone...  
Of every planted seed.  
It carries a name forward,  
Gives meaning when we leave.  
So thanks for all the letters,  
The calls and e-mails too.  
Let's, together, create tomorrow  
A trade both proud and true.

# Early Exposure Breeds Success

By Cindy Seel, Executive Director, PMA Education Foundation

**T**hink about how you landed your first job or made your first great business deal. Chances are, it was because you'd made a connection — through a mentor, a mutual friend or networking. Business (and life) is all about connections — meeting the right people at the right time.

What if, early in your career, you'd had a gateway to important business connections that might have eased or enhanced your career path?

Some of today's students have that opportunity, thanks to the Pack Family/PMA Career Pathways Fund, a collaborative initiative started by Jay and Ruthie Pack and managed by the PMA Education Foundation (PMAEF). Hailed by educators as one of the best industry/student programs available from any industry, the Pack scholarship enables selected students and faculty from seven domestic and five international universities to attend Fresh Summit. Students learn, network and discover the breadth and depth of the opportunities offered by the produce industry — all in one place.

"We take students to numerous trade shows and conventions each year," says Jerry Bradley, director of the food marketing cooperative education program at St. Joseph's University in Philadelphia. "The exposure they get at Fresh Summit is fabulous! Nowhere else do senior executives and CEOs get personally involved, and nowhere else are students invited to participate in everything. This program is highly successful because of the genuine interest the industry shows these students."

That interest is paying off for Career Pathways alumni and the produce industry. "Some [of our students] who have attended Fresh Summit have expressed that it expanded their horizons on the types of career paths they're considering," says Roberta Cook, cooperative extension economist in the Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics at the University of California, Davis (UCD). "The program has formed a bridge between people with high-level backgrounds in science and the produce industry." Half of UCD's student participants, who would never have considered fresh produce as a career path, are either now working in the industry or seriously considering it as a direct result of being a Pack scholar. In fact, the Pack program has at least a 40 percent success rate among students who have graduated.

The program has been so successful in its four years of operation that Michigan State University (MSU) is now selecting sophomores for participation. "In the past, we chose mostly juniors and seniors," notes Larry Zink, industry relations liaison in MSU's Agricultural Economics Department. "However, we've discovered that by their senior year, students already have their internships; they go to Fresh Summit and see the opportunities, and it's too late for them to change." Earlier exposure to the industry, he believes, will result in more students seriously considering careers in produce.

One critical component of future program success is the



word-of-mouth support generated by Pack alumni who go back and tell their friends about the experience. "The students are excited when they come back," says Kristen Park, a Cornell University research associate who helps coordinate the selection process. "We don't have to do a lot of recruiting; former Pack scholars do it for us when they talk to other students."

The Career Pathways program is just one PMAEF initiative. Its success proves the point many educators make — purposeful exposure to the produce industry brings tremendous returns to students and leads to highly talented employees for industry companies. And purposeful exposure is just what foundation leaders envision for the future.

When asked recently what the foundation could do to aid in encouraging students to consider the produce industry as a career path, a group of educators involved in the Pack program gave us a clear message: exposure. Getting "face time" with students on a regular basis is critical to ensure they know the jobs are there — and the types of jobs are comparable to other industries. "The companies students think about are the companies on campus," adds Zink.

Cook agrees. "I can't emphasize enough how important it is to get through the 'clutter' bombarding students; it's not enough to just set up a Web site. The industry needs to work with both academic and career services departments."

PMAEF is planning that combination of activities. The foundation's business plan includes creating partnerships between industry and institutions to provide students with internship opportunities, job shadowing, a job bank, career-resources Web site and a variety of activities that will put industry members and their companies in front of students.

Of course, it won't happen all at once. And it will take industry participation in a variety of ways, most importantly in these early stages through financial contributions that will help make these plans reality. No one else is poised to take on this challenge industry-wide. Ed McLaughlin, professor of marketing and director of the Food Industry Management Program at Cornell University, recently summed it up when he said, "PMAEF provides for the first time a nationally organized effort to bring creative solutions to attracting young people to the produce industry." McLaughlin feels so strongly about the effort that he has personally contributed to the foundation's cause, as have other educators including Cook.

It's been said it takes a village to raise a child; in our case, it will take an industry working together to ensure the future of our companies and our industry.

**One critical component of future program success is the word-of-mouth support generated by Pack alumni.**

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As a result of a special grant provided by Mann Packing Company and Grimmway Enterprises, funds have been secured to allow four select individuals (two from retail and two from the foodservice operator segment) to receive all inclusive scholarships to attend the 2008 PMA/PRODUCE BUSINESS/CORNELL Invitational Leadership Symposium in Dallas, TX, January 16-18, 2008.

The goal of the program is to allow gifted participants from retail and foodservice to engage with their peers from other industry sectors and immerse themselves in a program that goes beyond the produce trade to encourage strategic thinking and a broader perspective on business.

If you would like to be nominated or if you would like to nominate someone else, please visit [www.producebusiness.com](http://www.producebusiness.com) and complete the short form.

For more information, please contact Ken Whitacre, publisher, at [KWhitacre@phoenixmedianet.com](mailto:KWhitacre@phoenixmedianet.com) or call 561-994-1118, ext 101.

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# Attending PMA Fresh Summits

**T**oday's high-tech world provides the opportunity to enjoy live access to professional athletic performances in vivid color at the press of a TV remote button. With instantaneous, close-up replays from MLB, NFL, NHL, NBA, NASCAR and PGA as well as hundreds of collegiate athletic endeavors, what could be better for the sports aficionado? However, being there provides an entirely different feeling not to be duplicated in the confines of TV viewing. Not only do you witness the action, but you also experience the associated activity and overall environment coupled with your involvement.

The same can also be said for attending PMA's expansive summits each year. With attendance continuing to grow tremendously since the first conference three decades ago, it is clear how many people realize the value gained by participating.

What about those who are not there? Yes, someone has to keep business functioning while principal players are away, but certainly there are lots of others who never make the effort or take the opportunity. It is easy enough to obtain the highlights from various industry publications as well as checking PMA's Web site for topics of potential interest.

But just like watching TV events, it's not the same as being there. Of course, in recent years, some say attending isn't what it used to be. Thank goodness. I remember well those conventions in the mid-1970s when there was more time — some say quality time — to spend with attendees. The programs were good, the exhibits were easier to cover and the main meal speakers could be viewed up close without large strategically placed viewing screens being a necessity. Jump forward to this millennium and the industry problems and opportunities being confronted. While those early years were great, they were the minor leagues by comparison.

As the organization continues to grow, both with its professional and industry-wide leadership, the question begging to be answered is how is one going to approach these functions or what does one need to do to obtain a better understanding of the industry in order to be successfully involved.

Unfortunately, a minority of attendees views the PMA summit as a work break with the opportunity to be wined and dined rather than as an opportunity to expand the scope of their industry

involvement. The majority fall into two groups. First are those who have regularly attended PMA summits for some time and already have their approach set in stone. The second group is made up of irregular attendees — for whatever reason — and new attendees. It is this group of people who are in need of a business plan to make the experience meaningful and efficient.

For many, seeing those familiar faces becomes paramount, as it should. But will those known players contribute anything additional to your results beyond what you had previously expected from them?

On the other hand, there are hundreds, if not thousands, of participants with backgrounds and information completely different from what you may have previously encountered. Attending meal functions, you have the choice of sitting with those you know or sitting at a table with strangers. My experience tells me there is a wide range of opportunities for knowledge-sharing on topics you were previously unfamiliar with. Where else can you meet so many industry people from the far reaches of the world, representing such a diversity of interests?

With the thousands of exhibitors, it is relatively impossible to have in-depth involvement with everyone. And your feet do get tired. A specific approach is a necessity on the exhibit floor. Who are the new exhibitors? What are the items not previously in the marketplace? What trends do these signify? Is the product mix changing? What is the future roll for packaging? Will the increasing number of value-added offerings bring about a shift from the commodity business environment so prevalent in the previous millennium? What will be the strategic impact on my business?

This is not to say avoid the known. Balancing the old and the new will be required to implement new directions when you return to your daily activity.

Nonetheless, the summit should serve as a preview for other activities and participation throughout the year. Often these other activities, given their smaller formats, provide an equal or better opportunity to become more

closely involved with the industry.

At today's pace, the produce industry is fortunate to have PMA leadership. The big question is: Will your attendance and involvement achieve proportionate results?

**pb**

**Where else can  
you meet so  
many industry  
people from the  
far reaches of  
the world,  
representing  
such a diversity  
of interests?**



# Will The Real Food-Safety Experts Please Step Forward?

**W**hy does it always take a life-or-death crisis for our produce business to progress? In the '60s and '70s, the Chavistas (Cesar, not Hugo) did a major character assassination on the California grape industry on labor issues. Grapes were pulled from store shelves. The government held hearings to understand the situation.

The head foreman in charge of our labor camp, a man with little formal education, received a telegram inviting him to testify in front of Sen. Robert Kennedy at the Delano High School Auditorium. Frank Ramirez answered the questions as well as he could. Frank didn't understand all the big words of the Harvard-educated senator, but he knew enough to realize he was being talked down to.

Cesar Chavez and actor Steve Allen were fawned over. There may have been some merit to some claims, but it was never as bad as their propaganda. Nevertheless, in the fields, many overdue changes finally happened.

Fast forward to the 21st century. The Salinas salad bowl is under attack, and the collateral damage affects farms big and small, coast to coast. Vegetables are pulled from store shelves. Government hearings are held. This time the inquisitor is a California state senator with a Harvard MBA. The produce people are summoned and talked down to. Outside activists say our industry is populated by untrustworthy safety slackers and independent government oversight is the only way to stop the illness and death.

Once again, there may be some merit to some claims, but it was never as bad as the propaganda. And, again, in the field, many overdue changes finally happened.

In between, our company dealt with an infestation of Mediterranean fruit fly (courtesy of Mother Nature), the Alar crisis (courtesy of the press), the cyanide sabotage of Chilean grapes (courtesy of some unidentified spooks) and five anti-dumping trade actions (courtesy of friends and foes). We have means of dealing with press, pests, politicos and even terrorists, using PR, quarantine protocols, lobbyists and bio-security measures. Standard practices that once seemed unthinkable are now routine. But what to do about Mother Nature and her microbials? Will the real food-safety experts please step forward?

Our industry read and reread the *Guide to Minimize Microbial Food Safety Hazards*. We employed Hazard Analyses to find our Critical Control Points. We developed — and implemented — our good practices...

I'm sorry, but I don't remember the paragraph on indemnity letters. You know the letters. The ones that say if anyone points a fin-

ger at the buyer, the supplier agrees to be a human shield in all lawsuits. Or maybe there was a companion document called the *Guide to Minimize Microbial Food Safety Liability* that I missed.

This approach does not increase food safety one bit. It simply redistributes the blame. Would not the correct approach be: The buyer looks at the supplier's food safety approach, and if it's adequate, you get a vendor number. If a supplier is deficient, you go on reeducation, probation, vacation or run laps after practice until you can make the team.

As a grower, I'm responsible to know that my labor contractor's workers have been instructed where they can and cannot eat their

lunch. It's usually the parents who are on their kids about washing their hands, but it takes a special kind of "trainer" to talk to adults about hand washing and hygiene. Got any idea of the carbon footprint we've created overnighting samples to pesticide residue labs over the last 20 years?

My cold storage has better pest control, rodent control and cleaning than my home. If a buyer sends in a truck that doesn't pass the smell test, we don't load it, no matter how tight trucks are.

While we must look out for the other guy, we cannot be our brother's keeper. I know of a not-so-small chain in Los Angeles that buys off the old 7th Street Market (still). If my grapes get sent to a legit house in Los Angeles, get sold to the nasty 7th Street jobber, end up in those stores and there's a problem, guess who they call? The guy whose name is on the box.

I hate to say it, but for every company with a traceback system in place, there is a supplier who marks his packages with the minimum shipper info of an unregistered DBA.

Through the magic of broker-to-broker lateral trading, these sketchy products can end up being moved through channels owned by publicly traded companies whose executives sit on the food safety committees of our industry's finest associations. With mixed signals like this, I'm too confused to be angry.

So let's get serious about minimizing food-safety hazards. If *Consumer Reports* showed up to evaluate your food-safety systems for a retailer, wholesaler, processor or supplier comparison, what would your reaction be? Bring it on or run and hide?

Would a stack of indemnity letters impress Consumers Union?

Will the real food-safety experts please stand up? Analyze the operation, identify the control points, establish the procedures, train the help, do the good practices and fill out the log sheets. And follow the mother of all food-safety best practices — only trade with people who do the same.

pb

**John Pandol is Vice President of Special Products at Pandol Brothers.**



# Produce Industry's Role In Social Responsibility

**C**orporate Social Responsibility, or CSR, is an important business precept in the United Kingdom, and the concept is attracting increasing attention in the United States. At its most basic, it involves holding a business responsible for its social and environmental impact.

Although government may encourage CSR by urging its inclusion in the annual reports required of U.K. businesses, at base CSR consists of "voluntary actions that business can take, over and above compliance with minimum legal requirements, to address both its own competitive interests and the interests of wider society."

What drives interest in CSR in the United Kingdom? CSR efforts encompass many things, from helping people and fighting poverty to promoting honest and open trade, safety for employees, etc., and there is much emphasis on "green" issues such as the environment and recycling. A business practicing CSR can burnish its reputation by winning any number of awards for its CSR efforts and appearing high up in all kinds of rankings published in newspapers and magazines.

Clearly, however, the overwhelming driver for interest in CSR activities is concern related to global warming.

Though consumers in the United Kingdom are somewhat confused regarding the details of global warming, there is a general consensus that climate change is real. Retailers are adapting their business practices and their promotions to this reality. Some retail messages are getting through to consumers.

Retailers' CSR efforts go far beyond produce. Marks & Spencer, for example, has won awards for its animal welfare, sustainable seafood and "fur free" efforts — just to mention a few.

In clothing, Marks & Spencer offers 70 percent of its clothing line with a capability of being washed at 30° Celsius — meaning it uses 40 percent less energy per wash.

Much U.K. retail promotion now revolves around CSR. A random glance at company Web sites shows J Sainsbury promoting the *Five principles behind everything we do*, namely, being *the best for food and health, respect for our environment, sourcing with integrity, making a positive difference to our community and a great place to work*.

Meanwhile, ASDA, Wal-Mart's U.K. subsidiary, promotes its drive to cut packaging dramatically, and Marks & Spencer highlights its *Plan A. Because there is no Plan B.* This campaign focuses on Marks & Spencer's actions regarding climate change, raw materials, healthful eating, waste and being a fair partner.

Although the speed and extent of global warming are uncertain,

there is a consensus that it is occurring and a palpable "feeling in the air" among consumers that climate change is real.

Former U.S. Vice President Al Gore's movie, *An Inconvenient Truth*, has brought additional attention to the issue and popularized images such as polar bears adrift melting ice. Environmental groups have kept the focus on global warming. Greenpeace, for example, promotes that the *Doomsday Clock*, a concept developed by the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists to represent how close the world was to nuclear conflagration, has been reset to *5 minutes to Midnight* on the strength of the threat to human civilization by global warming.

Many implications for the fresh produce industry derive from concern for global warming and the broader CSR concept:

- We can expect a great emphasis on locally grown product.
- More product will be sold loose as opposed to prepackaged in plastic.
- There will be great concern with the provenance of the product — both where it comes from and who grew it.
- Organics will grow in importance as will "fairtrade" products, by which poor communities in developing countries earn a premium to help upgrade the lives and improve the communities of poor farm workers.

Marks & Spencer has committed to buy as much food from the United Kingdom and Ireland as possible and is in the midst of programs that will double regional food sourcing within 12 months. Much effort is being made to grow the local supply networks while attempts are made to reduce the amount of product that is air-freighted. All food imported by air is being labeled as flown.

Marks & Spencer is hardly alone in these efforts. Waitrose is heavily promoting a *Regional Food, British Food* and *Local Food* initiative — all while its Waitrose Foundation focuses on helping Africa.

Although many CSR efforts are undertaken out of a sincere desire to help the world and others still are done for marketing reasons, most executives in the United Kingdom expect legislation will eventually mandate many of these activities, particularly related to carbon emissions and global warming.

The role each of us can play in the CSR movement depends on our situation and station. But all of us can and should attempt to take a lead on this important issue. If nothing else, we can all strive to be an example for the rest of the trade and to help our own stakeholders understand the critical importance of the issues we face and the role of CSR in resolving these crucial issues.

pb

*Andrew Sharp serves as business development director for Mack Multiples, Kent, United Kingdom. He was formerly senior manager quality control & assurance for Marks & Spencer. He serves on the board of directors of the Produce Marketing Association.*

# INFORMATION SHOWCASE

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OCTOBER 2007

COMPANY	PAGE #	RS#	PHONE	FAX
A & L Potato Company, Inc.	184	.81	800-365-5784	218-773-1850
Louis J. Acompora Foundation	187	.126	800-223-8070	718-991-1599
Albert's Organics	157	.44	800-899-5944	610-388-8418
Alpine Fresh	134	.62	305-594-9117	305-594-8506
Arkansas Tomato Shippers, LLC	107	.7	888-706-2400	520-377-2874
E. Armita, Inc.	85	.125	800-223-8070	718-991-1599
Aspen Produce LLC	194	.225	719-754-3464	719-754-2342
Associated Potato Growers, Inc.	181	.79	800-437-4685	701-746-5767
Maurice A. Auerbach, Inc.	140	.19	201-807-9292	201-807-9596
Maurice A. Auerbach, Inc.	88	.48	888-AUERPAK	201-807-9596
Ayco Farms, Inc.	134	.52	954-788-6800	954-788-5600
Babe Farms, Inc.	178	.111	800-648-6772	805-922-3950
Wayne E. Bailey Produce Co.	163	.142	800-845-6149	910-554-4734
Philip Balsamo Company	84	.165	630-575-8000	630-575-8004
Basciani Foods, Inc.	196	.130	610-268-3044	610-268-2194
BelleHarvest Sales, Inc.	154	.192	800-452-7753	616-794-3961
Bengard Ranch, Inc.	178	.191	831-422-0997	831-422-7782
Blue Book Services	147	.6	630-668-3500	630-668-0303
Boskovich Farms, Inc.	65	.186	805-487-2299	805-487-5189
Jack Brown Produce, Inc.	156	.40	616-887-9568	616-887-9763
Bucolo Cold Storage	158	.167	716-778-7631	716-778-8768
C&S Wholesale Grocers, Inc.	125	.174	860-527-2550	413-247-3978
California Sun Dry Foods	131	.70	800-995-7753	925-743-9336
Cameo Apple Marketing Association	152	.148	509-665-3280	773-298-5984
Canada Garlic	140	.15	905-362-1888	905-362-1889
Canon Potato Company, Inc.	193	.127	719-754-3445	719-754-2227
Capital City Fruit Co., Inc.	172	.93	515-981-5111	515-981-4564
CarbAmericas	134	.54	954-786-0000	954-786-9678
Castle Rock Sales	116	.78	661-721-8717	661-721-0419
Central American Produce, Inc.	134	.128	954-943-2303	954-943-2067
CF Fresh	126	.175	360-855-0566	360-855-2430
Champ's Mushrooms	196	.129	866-Champs!	604-607-0787
Chandler Packaging Inc.	78	.217	800-565-5245	905-274-9522
Chestnut Hill Farms	134	.57	305-592-5969	305-436-8968
Chilean Avocado Importers Association	25	.43	202-626-0560	
Christopher Ranch	141	.88	408-847-1100	408-847-0581
Cirilli Brothers	105	.168	520-281-9696	520-281-1473
Classic Yam	164	.204	209-394-8656	209-394-8714
Coast To Coast Produce Co.	92	.64	203-271-2006	203-271-2796
Coastline Produce	179	.153	831-755-1430	831-755-1429
Cohen Produce Marketing	154	.193	800-633-6173	717-677-6120
Colorado Potato Administrative Committee	191	.169	719-852-3232	719-852-4684
Columbia Marketing International	155	.30	509-663-1955	509-663-2231
Cryovac Division (W.R. Grace & Co. - Conn.)	72	.157	800-845-3456	
Cryovac Division (W.R. Grace & Co. - Conn.)	73	.158	800-845-3456	
Crystal Valley Foods	134	.140	800-359-5631	305-592-9803
Curry & Company	39	.124	800-929-1073	503-393-6088
Customized Brokers	134	.156	305-471-8989	305-471-8988
D'Arrigo Bros. Co. of New York	83	.28	800-223-8080	718-960-0544
Date Pac LLC	38	.73	928-726-9191	928-726-9413
Dawson Farms	164	.141	318-878-5806	318-878-2826
Del Monte Fresh Produce	220	.92	800-950-3683	305-520-8495
Diamond Fruit Growers	34	.155	541-354-1492	541-354-2123
Distribuidora de Vegetales Mexicanos S.A. de C.V.	69	.200	888-321-6779	667-760-5408
DNE World Fruit Sales	144	.218	800-327-6676	722-465-1181
Dole Fresh Fruit Company	2	.107	818-879-6600	818-879-6628
Domex Superfresh Growers	161	.205	509-966-1814	509-966-3608
dProduce Man Software	202	.106	888-PRDMON	650-127-9973
Driscoll Strawberry Associates, Inc.	41	.23	831-763-5000	831-761-5988
Duda Farm Fresh Foods, Inc.	171	.135	561-978-5714	561-978-5705
Earthbound Farm	123	.58	888-624-1004	831-623-7886
East Coast Brokers & Packers, Inc.	169	.20	800-557-7751	813-669-9850
Edible Software	56	.189	832-200-8000	832-200-8001
Edinburg Citrus Association	142	.176	956-381-8520	956-383-2435
Ethylene Control, Inc.	106	.27	800-200-1909	559-896-3232
Eurofresh Farms, Ltd.	61	.101	520-384-4621	520-384-4187
European Vegetable Specialties Farms, Inc.	29	.84	831-758-1957	831-758-6649
Farm Pak Products, Inc.	164	.187	800-367-2799	252-459-9020
Joseph Fierman & Sons, Inc.	95	.61	718-893-1640	718-328-3738
The Florida Tomato Committee	175	.206	407-660-1949	407-898-4296
Four Seasons Produce, Inc.	93	.17	800-422-8384	717-721-2597
Fowler Farms	150	.177	315-594-8068	315-594-8060
Fox Packaging	76	.202	956-682-6176	956-682-5768
Fresh Partners AB	64	.95	46-8-742-1215	46-8-742-6201
Fresh Produce Association of The Americas	177	.25	250-287-2707	520-287-2948
Fresh Quest	50	.222	954-964-9554	954-946-8760
Friedman & Broussard Produce, Inc.	164	.63	800-671-9018	985-646-2302
Fru-Veg Marketing, Inc.	134	.56	305-591-7766	305-591-7765
Garber Farms	164	.152	337-824-6328	337-824-2676
Garcia Farms Produce	165	.76	209-394-8356	209-394-3413
Genpro Transportation Services, Inc.	90	.18	800-243-6770	973-589-1877
George Foods	163	.142	800-845-6149	910-654-4734
Giorgio Fresh Co.	38	.8	800-330-5711	610-939-0296
Giorgio Fresh Co.	196	.194	800-330-5711	800-330-5711
The Giuranna Companies	43	.131	213-627-2900	213-628-4878
Global Organic Specialty Source, Inc.	122	.41	877-952-1198	941-358-6551
Global Organic Specialty Source, Inc.	127	.195	877-952-1198	941-358-6551
Gourmet Specialty Imports LLC	141	.53	610-345-1113	610-345-1116
Grimmway Farms	33	.188	661-845-9435	661-393-6458
A. Gurdji Produce Farms	34	.86	845-258-4422	845-258-4852
Ham Produce Co., Inc.	165	.77	866-747-8200	252-747-9255
Harvest Sensations	134	.139	305-591-8173	305-591-8173
Hass Avocado Board	45	.97	949-341-3250	888-466-4667
Herb Thyme Farms	56	.85	831-476-9733	831-476-3710
Hess Brothers Fruit Co.	156	.75	717-656-2631	717-656-4526
Hollandia Produce	15	.13	805-684-4146	805-684-9363
Honey Bear Tree Fruit Co.	158	.185	952-746-1315	
HydroSprey Mirabel, Inc.	59	.219	888-868-6060	450-475-6884
I Love Produce, LLC	140	.224	610-869-4664	610-869-2711
Idaho Potato Commission	51	.59	208-334-2350	208-334-2274
Idaho-Eastern Oregon Onion Promotion Committee	57	.24	888-466-4667	208-722-6582
Inline Plastics Corp.	71	.35	800-826-5567	203-924-0370
International Hotel Motel & Rest	166	.29	800-272-2707	800-272-2707
J & J Produce	118	.170	956-664-9218	561-422-9777
Jacobs, Malcolm & Burtt, Inc.	174	.207	561-422-9777	415-285-0400
JB-J Distribution, Inc.	130	.212	714-992-4920	415-284-4844
S. Katzman Produce	85	.60	718-991-4700	718-389-3655
Kern Ridge Growers, LLC	121	.89	661-854-3156	661-854-2832
Keystone Fruit Marketing, Inc.	135	.133	772-316-0364	717-597-4096
Kingsburg Orchards	5	.100	559-897-2986	559-897-4532
Kirkey Products Group, LLC	172	.39	407-331-5151	407-331-5158
L&M Companies, Inc.	170	.103	509-698-3881	509-698-3922
Tom Lange Co.	143	.36	217-786-3300	217-786-2570

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Leroy Smith, Inc.	144	.215	772-567-3421	772-567-8428
LGS Specialty Sales, Ltd.	67	.220	800-796-2349	718-542-2354
Lithouse Foods, Inc.	112	.3	800-669-3169	208-263-7821
Lucky Strike Farms, Inc.	179	.178	650-877-8333	650-877-0727
Allen Lund Company, Inc.	188	.179	800-404-5863	818-983-5863
Lynn-Ette & Sons, Inc.	116	.216	585-682-4435	585-682-4968
Magnolia Packing, Inc.	116	.212	229-924-6997	229-924-2010
Maine Potato Board	64	.31	207-769-5061	207-764-4148
Mann Packing Company, Inc.	9	.22	800-884-6266	831-422-5171
Maple Lane Farms LLC	139	.201	860-889-3766	860-887-3087
Mariani Packing Co.	78	.5	707-452-2800	707-453-8334
T. Marzetti Company	111	.33	614-846-2232	614-842-4186
Robert Masha Sales, Inc.	197	.137	610-268-0444	610-268-0837
Mediterranean Pleasures	137	.208	800-491-VITA	856-467-2638
Melissa's World Variety Produce, Inc.	124	.145	800-468-7111	323-588-7841
Mexican Department of Agriculture/ASERCA	109	.213	202-728-1723	
Mills Family Farms	49	.1	831-757-3061	831-424-9475
Mills Family Farms	178	.2	831-757-3061	831-424-9475
Misionero Vegetables	128	.45	800-EAT-SALAD	831-424-0740
Mission Produce, Inc.	135	.122	888-549-3421	805-981-3660
MIXTEC Group	101	.119	626-440-1557	
Monterey Mushrooms	197	.180	638-587-2771	831-763-2300
Mooney Farms	36	.42	530-899-2661	530-899-7744
Mountain Valley Produce, LLC	195	.223	800-360-2139	719-754-3190
Muller Trading Co., Inc.	163	.196	847-549-9511	847-540-7758
N&W Farms	165	.155	662-682-7961	662-682-7998
National Mango Board	53	.10	877-MANGO-5-1	407-629-8745
National Watermelon Promotion Board	146	.71	407-657-0261	407-657-2213
Naturipe Farms, LLC	13	.11	239-591-1164	239-591-8133
New Jersey Department of Agriculture	19	.87	609-292-8853	609-292-2508
New York Apple Association, Inc.	153	.26	585-924-2171	585-924-1629
New York State Departments of Agriculture & Markets	35	.110	800-554-4501	518-457-2716
Nobles-Collier, Inc.	172	.226	239-657-4401	239-657-4407
Nokota Packers, Inc.	182	.82	701-847-2200	701-847-2109
North Bay Produce	135	.150	231-946-1941	231-946-1902
Northern Plains Potato Growers Assn.	183	.83	218-773-3633	218-773-6227
Ocean Mist Farms	23	.123	831-633-2492	831-633-4363
P.E.I. Potato Board	101	.50	902-892-6551	902-566-4914
Pacific Fruit Inc.	37	.108	718-816-9330	718-556-8457
Pacific Organic Produce	122	.136	415-673-5555	415-673-5585
Pacific Tomato Growers/Pacific Triple E	178	.68	209-835-7500	209-835-7595
Pacific Tomato Growers/Pacific Triple E	128	.69	941-722-0778	941-729-5829
Pandol Brothers, Inc.	219	.99	661-725-3145	661-725-4741
Pear Bureau Northwest	55	.38	503-652-9720	302-235-5555
Pennsylvania Exotic Mushroom Sales, Inc.	197	.98	610-444-0275	610-444-5751
The Perishable Specialist, Inc.	135	.121	305-477-9906	305-477-2409
The Produce Marketing Association	103	.90	302-738-7100	302-731-2409
Produce Plus	68	.74	800-323-3730	815-293-3701
Produce Pro, Inc.	84	.14	630-395-0535	630-372-0390
ProducePackaging.com	74	.163	800-644-8729	610-588-6245
Progressive Marketing Group	135	.134	323-890-8100	323-890-8113
Rainier Fruit Company	149	.105	509-697-6131	509-897-3800
Walter P. Rau & Sons, Inc.	46	.37	803-894-1900	803-359-8850
R.C.F. Produce, Inc.	118	.214	520-281-0230	520-281-2967
Red Blossom Farms, Inc.	47	.132	805-981-1839	805-983-0032
Red Jacket Orchards, Inc.</				

# Blast from the Past

**G**rocery stores were very different in the early 1930s as this picture demonstrates.

Al Finer, president of Al Finer Co. in Philadelphia, PA, shares this photograph of one of his father's seven retail stores, which were located in predominately Jewish areas of Philadelphia in the early years of the last century. Al's father Jake, his mother Sylvia and several of Al's uncles managed the stores.

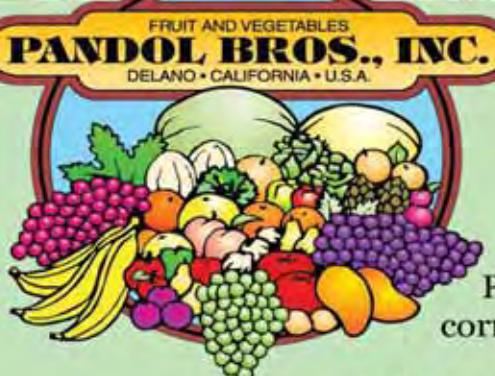
This photo was taken at a store in the Strawberry Mansion area. Jake stocked each of his stores to accommodate its demographics but his basic belief was that buying bigger fruit would translate into more sales. In this location, customers were looking for the biggest and best of everything. Al points out the Great Depression era price points — 5¢, 20¢, 4 for 10¢.

Over the course of his retail career, Jake Finer sold and took back this particular store six times. After developing diabetes, he was forced to give up his retail operations.

The people in the photo are (left to right) John, a salesman who also trimmed the produce and stocked the shelves but whose last name has been lost to time, Al's mother Sylvia Finer and an unidentified customer.



The *Blast from the Past* is a regular feature of PRODUCE BUSINESS. We welcome submissions of your old photos, labels or advertisements along with suggested captions. Please send materials to: Editor, PRODUCE BUSINESS, P.O. Box 810425, Boca Raton, FL 33481-0425, or e-mail [ProduceBusiness@PhoenixMediaNet.com](mailto:ProduceBusiness@PhoenixMediaNet.com)



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